YET IT WAS A VERY SOBER TIME, ON THE WHOLE.

THEIR CLUB AND OURS

BY

JOHN PRESTON TRUE

WITH THIRTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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THEIR CLUB AND OURS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE OLD MILL.

A LONG, low room, lighted by half a dozen broad windows, through which the light was stealing betwixt the drops of a hard April shower.

Over the fireplace, in which a light blaze was leaping up around the logs of rock maple and pine, hung a fly-rod, book and creel. In one corner stood a tall clock of our grandfathers' days, the works of which had long since been converted into various and curious models of impossible machines, and through whose half-open door came a twinkle of steel barrels and polished bows; while the walls of the room were covered with evergreens, wasps' nests, skins, hawks' wings, and other treasures dear to the average boy's heart.

At a window a boy of seventeen was writing at

a desk. At the old table another was putting the finishing touches to a charcoal sketch. Two more boys were at work at a couple of lathes in a corner, run by a tremendous water-wheel, whose thundering roar shook the old building with quiver and creak. The last member of the quintet stood idly leaning against a window-seat, watching in a fit of happy listlessness the furious gusts of rain as they swept down the long slope and up the roughened water of the stream until lost in the windings of the wood.

The wild scene was worth looking at. The stream below, black with wind, seemed to flow backward through the tall, ghostly birches that swayed and writhed in the gale; while the narrow canal that led from the lake along the bluff, danced with a continuous shower of pearls that leaped in confusion over the grass and through the old apple-trees that overgrew it; and the rotting flume underneath the window was veiled in mist from the jetting water that burst from every crack, worm-hole and nail along its course to fall in spray upon the rocks below, while the hoarse mutter of the dam came up between the gusts.

Within the old mill, in the ancient counting-room, a look of cosy comfort prevailed that needed no contrast of the weather. It beamed up benignantly

A BOY'S PARADISE

from the rickety rocking-chair that squeaked alongside the lazy length of the canvas-covered lounge, and smiled all over the chip-covered floor. A genuine boy's paradise the old counting-room was, where we could make plenty of noise, and whittle all day — two necessities for paradise, to our minds.

This was the way of it: The mill had once on a time been devoted to wool. The owner thereof, making an incursion into the stock-market, came back shorn, made a change in the machinery, turned out spool-timber, got involved, forged a note, and went West.

Meantime the mill had been seized by the injured party, who knew nothing of the business, and finally abandoned it. Some months before our story opens, a few of us boys obtained permission to fit up the old counting-room for a club-house and work-shop.

Our club had no especial organization. That Jack, as chief, must be obeyed at all times, was the principal rule, and it was religiously kept; while a few others relating to harmony and order, and a complete code of signals varying from a simple "Hello!" to a call for help, executed on small double whistles, completed the law.

This code, by the way, was the source of great mystification and envy to those unfortunates who

did not belong to the organization, and in the old academy — everything is old in Zethel — there were a hundred or so of boys from the neighboring towns, with half as many girls.

"Jack!"

"Yes!" said the chief, still eyeing his sketch critically.

"If this rain holds we can't go up Sunday River fishing next week."

"I didn't know that we were going," answered Jack.

"Why, yes, some of us were thinking of it;" and turning to the window again, Bert drummed lazily against the pane.

"'Twon't pay you!" said Jack, putting in a tall poplar with one dextrous sweep of the coal.

"What's the reason?" demanded Bert.

"It takes a rap at his skill as a fisherman to stir Bert up!" laughed Jack, with a sly glance at the rest of us. "Keep cool, my jewel, I wasn't hitting at that; but the snow-water isn't out of the river yet, and there isn't a trout higher than the mouth. They are all down in the Androscoggin. These mountain streams are as cold as ice long after the lowlands are thawed out."

"But, Jack, you and Fred went as early last year,

and you brought home a whole load," argued Bert.

Jack glanced over at me. I knew of what he was thinking, and laughed back.

"What is it?" demanded Bert, looking suspiciously from one to the other.

"Oh, nothing, only a little joke that happened on that trip; shall I tell, Fred?"

"I'm willing."

"Well, you know uncle Luther Hardhead, don't you? He's the best fisherman in that district, and all the natives swear by him. We put up our team at his house, and some of them advised us not to go up the East Branch, as uncle Luther had been up only the day before and had brought back eighty, catching all there were there — and, by the way, Bert, it was a whole month later than this, for it was on Decoration day.

"But we didn't take advice worth a cent, and went straight up the East Branch. We caught about three hundred between us. If you could have seen the natives stare as we came staggering along!

"But the joke came afterwards.

"It was warm work tugging those heavy baskets down the bed of a mountain stream, and Fred, here, thought he would take a walk to cool off while the horse was being harnessed, and as luck would have

it, he came on a tremendous snow-bank in a gully, within ten rods of the house.

"It looked so jolly cold that he gave a regular war-whoop, and broke for it on a run and plunged in. He had floundered about half way across, singing away at the top of his voice, when all at once he gave a yell, and, throwing up his hands, disappeared.

"I made my way after, and gazed downward into a queer-looking hole. And lo! there was Master Fred in the bottom of the gully, with a leg of mutton on one side, and half a beef on the other, a pile of dressed fowls under him, and the most dumbfounded look on his face you ever saw. He had gone through the roof of uncle Luther's ice-house into his larder, and right in front of him was the old gentleman himself, steelyards in hand, staring with all his eyes.

"Wasn't that a joke on our worthy scribe, now?"

A shout of laughter went up that made the room echo, and drowned the rattle of the machinery. A fierce gust of rain burst against the windows during the lull that followed. Jack arose and looked out:

"We're booked for a freshet, sure; and the flush-boards are on the dam. Who's going to take 'em off?"

"Oh, let 'em stay!" drawled Bert with a look of dismay at the driving rain.

A GOOD JOKE ON FRED. 15

"Bert's getting constitutionally tired again," laughed Tom from his lathe.

"He needs the exercise — better send him, Jack."

"See here, you keep quiet, Tom Wylie!" bristled Bert. But Charlie Winter interposed. He was often the peacemaker between them, for Tom was a born tease, and Bert was undeniably "constitutionally tired."

"I took them off last night, Jack; we don't need any— there is water enough for all our turning through the summer."

"All right," said Jack; "and now come over here, all of you, for I've an idea; and Tom, do stop that thundering lathe a minute! It makes such a row along with the wheel and the storm, I can't hear myself think!"

Jack had a good many ideas, generally; and we flocked over to his table at once. He regarded us, one and all, with a look of solemn gravity.

"Boys," said he at last, "have you the least notion what day it is?"

"Saturday, to be sure! did you call me clear over here to ask that?" demanded Tom, with a wishful look at the unfinished bat upon the lathe.

"Yes; and in three days more it will be May-day."

We looked at each other in silence. A smile finally spread over one face after another.

"And how many of you have made due preparation in the matter of tissue-paper?" asked Jack, smiling half contemptuously at our discomfiture.

We looked at each other again. None of us had; we had forgotten all about it.

"And so, probably, the girls have bought up every inch by this time!" continued Jack.

"Did you mean to hang Katie Powers one this year, Jack?" asked Tom. No lamb could have bleated plaintively with a more innocent face.

A convulsive twitch was visible in Jack's cheek and throat. His very ears reddened.

"Poor Jack!" said Tom, looking around at us commiseratingly, with his right eye meekly closed. "He was bulletined last year, did some one say, or did I dream it? And he hasn't even yet forgiven Katie for being able to run faster than — Great Scott!" Tom leaped a foot into the air. "Charlie Winter, if I catch you!"

"I was only trying my new rod, Tom," said Charlie, calmly, as he darted around the table; "I just wanted to hit that fly on your ear. I suspect I missed him."

"I suspect you did!" said Tom feeling of the ear in question as he dashed after him, till Charlie, finding it getting too hot for him in such narrow quarters,

dashed suddenly through the door into the outer mill.

Around the old carding-machines, over the rollers, through the tangle of belts, he ran, dodging swiftly from post to pillar, and from pillar to post again; always just ready to be caught, only when Tom thought his hand was on him, he wasn't there.

But Tom was not the one to give up first, and Charlie soon began to tire. Catching up a gunny-bag he flung it behind him, and as Tom plunged headlong over it into a pile of shavings, he darted into the wheel-house, intending to cross the flume and draw the plank after him, when he would be safe from anything short of a ten-foot pole.

But alas for him!

An old belting lay upon the floor. His feet caught — a trip — a stumble forward — a vain endeavor to grasp a pillar — then down he plunged headlong into the great misty dashing flume, within ten feet of the roaring wheel. He did not even cry out, it was so sudden!

But a great gasp broke from Tom's lips. He had regained his feet, and had seen it all. Like a flash he was at the side of the flume. Leaning over, he caught Charlie by the collar as he was swept downward by the rushing water, and, twining his own legs around a stanchion, shouted for help. How strangely

weak it sounded amid the savage seethe of the hollow flume, and the harsh rattle of the shafting!

"Catch hold of the side, Charlie! Catch hold!" he cried.

It was too high up; nor could Tom, wiry as he was, raise him far enough: the rush of the leaping water down the steep incline was far too fierce. Three times he tried, and failed.

Again he shouted, sending forth the whole strength of his voice. He felt his hold slipping from the stanchion. He felt he was being slowly sucked down — down — nearer and nearer, till the bubbled foam leaped over his hands and dashed his face!

Charlie felt it too!

Once in, and Tom could never hope to come out. For a moment Charlie clung to him, and a shudder crept over him. He was afraid to die! He looked up once more into the white face of his dearest friend.

"Let go, Tom," he said steadily. "One is enough — let go, old fellow — and good-by!"

Poor Tom! He shrieked again. Would no one *ever* come?

"Let go, Tom!" said Charlie once more, and trying to release himself.

"I won't!" came grimly from the clinched teeth.

WOULD NO ONE EVER COME?

And now all the old Saxon grit in the boy's soul awoke from its long slumber through his chain of ancestors. Not Hereward himself ever threw his spirit into his mighty arm with a mightier force and determination than Tom Wylie in this last battle for his friend.

His muscles seemed to turn to steel wire. The veins in his forehead swelled, his eyes glittered, a thread of foam came out between his set teeth. Then his mind began to wander under the strain, and strange thoughts shot flashing across his brain, and flickering points of light gleamed here and there before his eyes. But not a finger quivered. He slipped no more.

Something fell from his pocket, and dangled against his hands from a tiny chain. It was the club call. Tom's eyes rested upon it mechanically for a moment. Then a glimmer of hope leaped into his face.

"Charlie!" he cried, "I'll hold you till doomsday, and after, too! Loose one hand — only one — and whistle the last call—for the last help—quick! quick!"

We were still around Jack's table, only idly interested in the chase. It was too common an occurrence to disturb us.

Jack was remarking that probably by this time Charlie was over the flume with the drawbridge up, when high above all the din came three shrill notes, quick and sharp, penetrating to the inmost corner of the mill !

It was like an electric shock.

What fun we had made of Jack when he proposed those signals ; he had laughed, himself, at the absurdity of the thought that they would ever be needed.

And now !

Without a word, but with a face that flamed white, our chief sprang at one bound to the wheel that shut the flow of water into the flume, and kicked away the board that held it.

The spokes flew around like lightning with a hoarse shriek.

A thousand thoughts flashed through me as we tore across the mill after Jack. How fearfully wide it was !

There was no heart in me. Where it had been there was a great void, faint, weakening, that seemed to swallow up my strength and to absorb it. I thought of Charlie — and of his sister ! What would she say when he was brought home dripping, slowly, with white face, and widely open eyes, still grasping eagerly at nothing ? And Tom, whom we all loved in spite of his teasing ways !

Jack was ahead, straining every nerve; but I was close second. Together we dashed through the wheel-house arch with a cry of cheer that rang high above all the roar; and throwing ourselves flat, leaned far over and grasped Charlie by the collar!

The next instant his whole weight came upon our arms; and had we not been well braced we must all have gone, for Tom could do no more. Had the fellows behind not grasped him in the nick of time he himself would have gone down even then!

But Charlie was safe in our grasp. We could not lift him out against the still savage water. We simply held on and waited. It was well for him that it had been burly Tom that caught him!

The water in the flume ebbed lower and lower. The great wheel below turned more and more slowly, and at last, with a long, disappointed creak, stopped altogether. We loosed our hold, and Charlie dropped back upon the slippery bed, rose, walked wearily up the channel to the little ladder, climbed it, and sank down upon the floor in a dead faint.

"Quick, boys! carry him in; that water was fearfully cold, and is freezing the life out of him!" gasped out Tom. He was sitting up against the stanchion and hugging himself for joy.

We brought him in to the warm, cosy club-room,

stripped him, rubbed and rolled him in a hot army blanket, and finally he opened his eyes as placidly as though just awaking from a long sleep.

Then shout after shout rang out until the din rivalled that of the now silent machinery. Even Bert caught the contagion, and as Charlie sat up rubbing his eyes, that usually apathetic youth started to his feet, wrenched Tom's half-finished bat from the chucks of the lathe, and swinging it around his head brought it down with a sounding whack across the table as he executed an impromptu war-dance in the middle of the floor, shouting out with all the vim of a vigorous baritone voice that was just changing, a "Noah's Ark" nonsense song that made the windows rattle.

And when he came to the quaint chorus we all joined in, and the old refrain swelled and rolled like a solemn song of thanksgiving along the low ceiling, out of the open door, to lose itself in the echoing, empty space of the outer mill:

> "If you belong to Gideon's band,
> Then here's my heart and here's my hand,
> Looking for a h-o-m-e!"

CHAPTER II.

SIMMERING DOWN.

NATURALLY, considerable excitement prevailed for some time. Various little accidents had befallen us as a club, but none of such dimensions and possibilities.

Bert, of course, had settled down at once. Charlie safely deposited, he curled himself up in the window-seat near the fire, and retired into his own reflections.

But the rest of us were still gathered around the old lounge on which Charlie lay wrapped like a mummy in his blanket, his coat, shirt and pants hanging from a line in front of the fire, after being well wrung by Tom and Jack, while a genial air of steam and wet woollen prevailed.

"Boys, we certainly must have a grating in front of that wheel," said Tom. "I believe I lived a year

in that five minutes. Say, Charlie, what were you thinking about while I held you there?"

Charlie opened his eyes contentedly upon his friend. With a slow smile he closed them again. The grateful warmth of the fire glowed in his white, chilled face, and lit up the semi-darkness of the room in flickering lights and shadows. We were silent, grouped around him. How strange it must be to have been so near death!

"I don't remember that I thought of anything much," he remarked at length, his eyes still closed. "The shock of the icy water half paralyzed me, and anyway there wasn't much time to think. I daresay it wasn't as long to me as it was to you, Tom. I remember I was dreadfully afraid I should pull you over, and I remember noticing how funny your coat collar looked as it stood up about your ears. I knew in a misty way what would happen if you should let go. You remember how Dr. Livingstone said he felt when a lion once was kicking him around for a plaything? It was very like that until you slipped. I woke up then! O Tom!"

Charlie tossed the blanket aside, and his arms were thrown around Tom.

Poor Tom! how red his face was as the tears gushed from his eyes. But his was not the only red

face, the only wet eyes. We all knew how the slender, gentle fellow had begged Tom to let him go down so that he might save himself. Tom busied himself getting Charlie back upon the lounge and into his blanket again, and we busied ourselves helping Tom. It was getting rather solemn. I think we all, even Tom, welcomed the flying chip which struck Jack full in the cheek, from the direction of the window seat, impelled by the immobile Bert. I know I felt a great sense of relief as we all laughed unduly. Charlie's stare was of such a shocked, dazed nature, that I could not help applying my fingers to the sole of a bare foot that stuck out invitingly beyond the blanket.

It was the end of the dreamy daze and the solemn situation. The good red blood dashed his face. He jumped as though touched with a red-hot iron, and squirmed and kicked so frantically that he rolled off the lounge and carried Tom with him, and if some one had not caught them, they would have gone straight into the fireplace, "all trussed and ready for roasting," as I remarked unfeelingly, for which they both rose in their might and chased me incontinently out of the room.

"I say, fellows!" I thrust my head cautiously in at the door to remark, "I want to say that if you

have decided to keep me out, that it's time you put the trout frying."

In the cold outer darkness I rather warmed to the idea that I was the sole cook in the crowd.

The door swung open. They cleared the decks for action spontaneously, Charlie got back into his blanket, and in a few minutes I was sitting on a box before the fire with the great iron dripper sizzling away in front, as I laid several white pieces of pork in it for a moment, and then daintily dropped in a dozen or so brook trout nicely rolled in meal; while a coffee-pot steamed away upon the hearth, rocking back and forth upon the raked-down coals.

The others, in the meantime, set the table with a few cracked plates, saucers, tin cups and the like, and emptied the baskets. Looking back, I am of opinion that the mothers of the club had talked us over. Certain it is, there were no grumblings in the home pantries over our baskets.

"You'll have to take a basket-cover, Tom," I remarked over my shoulder. "You smashed your last plate, you know, and there are not enough to go round."

Tom rubbed the point of his nose meditatively. Picking up a block of wood, he gazed at it a moment, balanced it in his hand, and then stepped over to the

FRYING THE BROOK TROUT. 31

gate-wheel and started his lathe. Five minutes later and he returned with a wooden plate! It was occasional feats of this kind which had endeared the burly fellow to our souls.

"When I break that, boys, just let me know!"

As it was about an inch thick there was no danger of it, unless he used it as a missile; and Jack suggested that instead of washing it he need only run it through the lathe again.

"Who brought any milk?"

Bert had, and it was in the flume. He looked rather uncomfortably out of the rain-streaked windows, but started off, and by the time he was back, supper was on the table and we were ready to fall into line.

For the next twenty minutes not a word was spoken; we were too busy. The table was cleared right and left. The biscuit followed the trout, the cakes followed the buscuit, and the pie followed all three. As we finished the last of the solids and were discussing a cup of coffee, Jack began where the accident had broken in upon him two hours before:

"Boys, joking aside, of course we will hang May-baskets this year, as usual — what do you say to clubbing together and having some good square runs?"

"We'd be much more likely to be caught. Five

of us never could all get away," said Bert dubiously.

"But all the more honor if we do," I suggested.

"Oh, that's all very well for you, who can run like a blue streak; but all of us are not as fleet as you, Fred, and if one does get caught he gets particular fits at school the next day. Those girls haven't an atom of mercy on a fellow!" and Bert shrugged his shoulders as though he had been there.

"Oh well, Bert! If there were no danger, where would be the fun?" said Tom impatiently. "It's the risk that makes the life of it, of course! What would base-ball be without the chance of a broken head sometime, or running the rapids on a saw-log if it wouldn't roll! A little ridicule won't hurt us!"

"Ask Jack what he thinks of that — and from Katie Powers," remarked Bert dryly.

There was a hearty club laugh. Even the annoyed chief joined in at last.

"Well, I'll own that I did have a lively time of it last year," he said, "and that Katie can outrun me. But for all that, if she does not get a basket at her door before the week is out, and of an original design, I'll never eat again;" and drinking half his coffee in the excitement of the moment, he leaned defiantly back in his chair, forgetting a chronic weakness in its hind legs.

A sudden ominous creak reminded him of it, and his hurried recovery of his balance rather detracted from the impressiveness of the declaration of war. That was a bad habit which those club-room chairs had — they often spoiled impressive periods.

"Jack," said Charlie, slowly, from his blanket, "Jack, what *is* the theory of May-baskets, anyway? They don't have 'em out West. I never heard of such a thing till I came to New England."

Charlie had been with us only since the fall term.

"Ask me something easier," laughed Jack. "I know more about the practice than the theory, and that varies in different sections. In the first place, we make them. Certain stereotyped materials, tissue-paper and pasteboard — seem to be necessary, and there is little change in form from year to year. Crimped paper and tails is the leading style — and candy. Then, during the first few nights of May it is our duty to our country to hang one on some young lady's door-knob, ring the bell, and — scoot! If we are caught we are bulletined next day at school, and are lucky if we don't fill a column or two in the next Lyceum paper, woe is me!"

There was a laugh as Jack shrugged his shoulders. Very good-naturedly he did it this time.

"It is a point of honor, you see, for the boys not to

be captured, and yet to give the girls a fair chance; while, on the other hand, if the girl does not find out who hung the basket, she has—well, a standing reproach upon her mantle, and curiosity in her heart; so they all do their best—usually. When the last of May arrives, it becomes the girls' duty to return favors in kind, and even to arouse the dormant consciences of such lagging heroes as have been remiss. Whatever girls are caught, are escorted home, of course, with all the accompanying rights and privileges. I never heard of their being bulletined though. There is one thing about it that I never thought of before," Jack went on: "it is a wonderful test of popularity. An unpopular fellow, or one with a shady character, is let severely alone, never gets even a shadow of a basket on his door. It is the same among the girls, too."

"Frank Powers told me that Katie has some fifty baskets hung around her room," I remarked.

"Daresay," nodded Jack. "If Katie is a tomboy, she's as good as gold, and would help a fellow out of a fix far quicker than her brother would. *He's* inclined to be missyish!" and our chief gave a look of unqualified disgust at the andiron which for the moment personified the absent Frank.

"After all, it's the tomboys that make the best

women," he continued musingly. "I have heard my mother say so often. I suppose they get such a start in living through being so lively in growing."

"Heigho!" yawned Tom, stretching his hands clasped above his head. "How would our worthy chief like to have Katie, Carrie, and one or two more elected and initiated into the 'Millers' Club'?"

The chief looked over at Tom. Tom was imperturbable.

"You stood on your head a little too long this afternoon, my poor fellow!" said Jack.

"We'd have a jolly time sending the lady members home such a night as this," said I.

"Just hear the rain!" said Charlie dreamily. "Snug in here, though, isn't it?"

Ah, but wasn't it snug in that old room on a rainy night!

"Better hoist the lantern, Tom, and let the folks know where we are," suggested Jack pleasantly.

Tom looked rather ruefully around the rosy room, and then at the wild wet windows. But he fished out the signal lamp, though, and lighting it, mounted the ricketty stairs that led to the roof.

We had a tall flagstaff there. From the top of it a light could be easily seen above the trees, at the village; and when we planned to stay all night from

the storm, or other causes, we ran up a red lantern for the benefit of the "old folks at home."

Coming down, Tom reported a gale "on deck;" but we were too comfortable to mind.

"By the way," he added, in a matter-of-fact tone, as though it were of the least consequence in the world, shaking the drops of water all over the room like a Newfoundland dog, "I forgot to say that the girls have started a club of their own."

Four pair of feet descended with a crash.

"What!"

Tom repeated his statement.

"When?" "Where?" "What for?" "How do you know?" Four questions in a breath.

"Yesterday; at our house; for fun. I was expelled from the room, of course, but I heard them chattering away like magpies. May is the secretary; she's rather ahead of you, Fred. She's got a book with a lock on it. She sat and scratched away all last evening. When have you written up the log?"

"What else?" said Jack. "Why don't you tell us something?"

"Well, then, they've got two chiefs, Carrie and Kate. They couldn't choose between, and so took both. Wonder how we'd get along with two heads to our club!"

HOISTING THE RED LANTERN.

Jack has a very expressive nose, long and mobile. He curled it here.

"What geese girls are!" he said.

"After all," observed Bert with a yawn, "it isn't so very strange. They never did let us start anything yet without trying to beat it. The only wonder is that they didn't get it up before. But who cares?"

And Bert yawned again tremendously. He was growing sleepy. Tom, too, seemed to have no further interest in the subject. In the old rocking-chair alongside Charlie he sat and read a newspaper.

Not so with Jack and myself. We meant to fathom this new freak; for when the girls banded together it generally meant mischief, and it behooved us to learn in what direction the lightning proposed travelling.

But by and by a low sound as of muttered thunder grew upon our ears. I thought it was the dam, but Jack broke into a laugh.

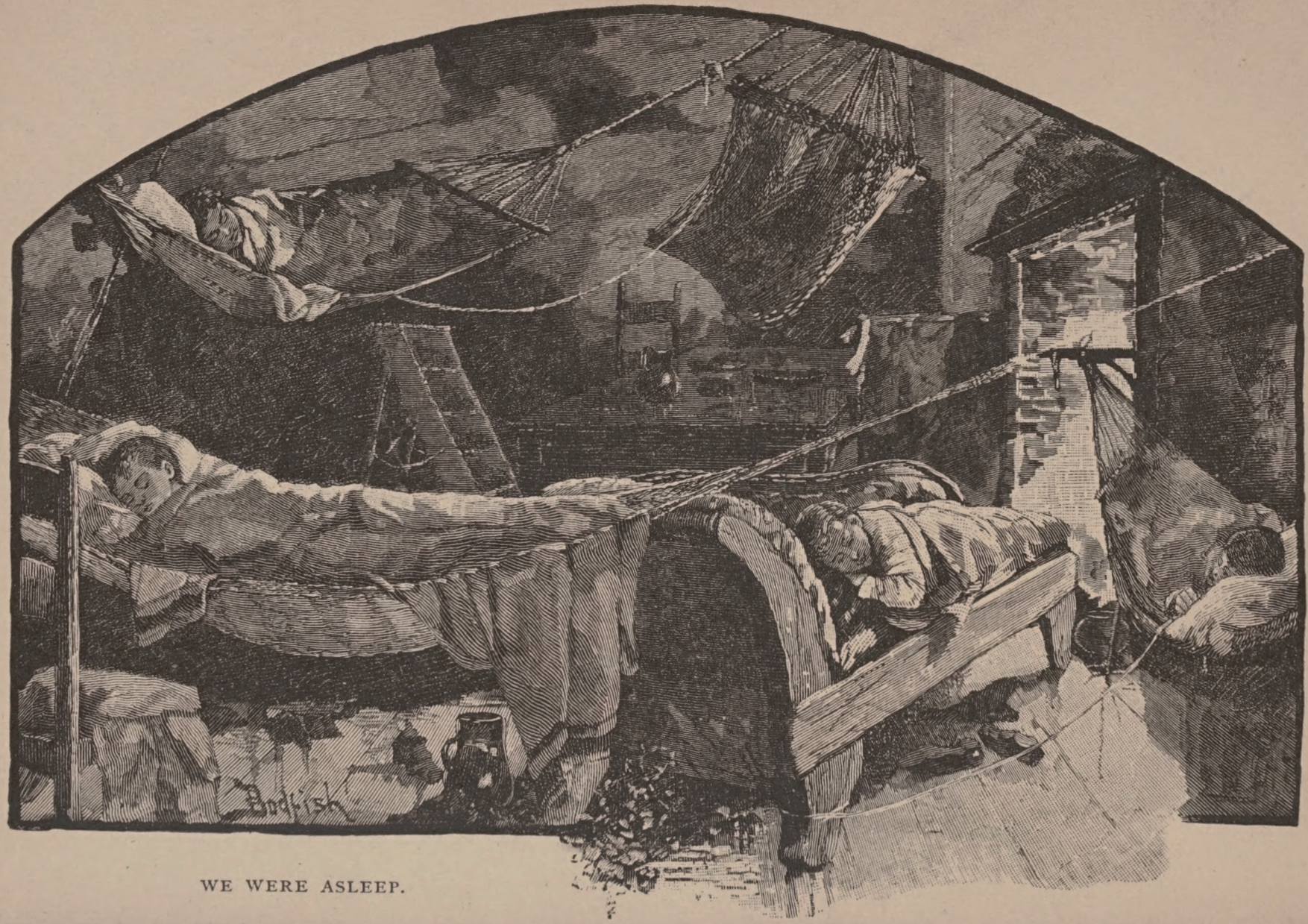
"It's Bert, asleep, sound as a turtle. Wake him up, somebody. Hullo here! everybody! It's time to turn in!"

There was a general bustle. Hammocks were got out, and slung from hooks in the wall; blankets were unrolled; and within fifteen minutes from the order every boy was nested, and swinging with a long, drowsy swoop back and forth, while little broke the

silence within save the occasional creak of a cord, and the crackle of the fire as it sent long tongues of light and shade flickering across the room, and stamped the shadow of a row of boots on the wall.

The rain beat in sharp, fitful gusts against the windows, and struck the roof with a muffled, monotonous rattle. The roar of the dam sounded faintly musical in the lulls, and found an echo in the upper fall. Then again, the mill bent and cracked before the blasts that filled the loft above with ghostly noises; a door slammed; the floor buckled and snapped as though a heavy man were walking across the outer hall; a tall shadow arose among the clustered boots, growing larger and wider, spreading right and left, till it engulfed the whole room, and finally swallowing up the fire, left it dark.

We were asleep.



WE WERE ASLEEP.

CHAPTER III.

THEIR CLUB.

(*From outside minutes of the proceedings.*)

TAP! tap! tap! Three quick blows with a tack-hammer on the table!

"Will the ladies of the 'Petticoat Nine' please come to order!" Sharp and decisive.

A general rustle, and then silence.

"Queen of the Door, is the hall clear of eavesdroppers, and everything secure?"

"It is, most worshipful Twinsister." The Queen of the Door made a low curtesy, and stifled a giggle behind her handkerchief.

"'Tis well! We will now listen to the secretary's report."

During the reading, the presiding Twinsister sat back in her chair. She was probably busily running over in her mind her coming speech, for just a line of doubtful thought was visible between her eyes as they

danced with fun behind their fringy palisades. There was also a sly little imp of mischief observed playing hide-and-seek among the curves of her smiling lips.

The reading ended; but she still sat smilingly gazing at nothing until aroused to her duty by a sharp pinch from her colleague. Stepping forward, with one hand resting lightly upon the table, and her head tossing back its wealth of flowing hair, "Ladies," she began, "I have a revelation to make unto your august assembly here to-night which will stand your hair on end 'like quills upon the fretful porcupine,' and cause your very hearts to quiver!"

She stopped, drank a little water from the glass before her, and looked solemn.

"I have received information, ladies, of a conspiracy against the peace and welfare of this sacred band of Sisters, as represented by myself; and are we not pledged to stand by one another amid all the vicissitudes of this weary life?" she asked, in a voice full of mock feeling.

"We are!" answered the members as with one voice; and the Queen of the Door advanced slowly into the middle of the room with the state utensils — a thrice-hallowed dustpan and brush — laid them

TAP! TAP! TAP!

carefully upon the little round centre-table amid a low chorus of chanting voices, and with bowed head retired backwards.

This was the Club chant:

"Bound are we in a league of wrath,
To sweep the Millers from our path."

All gazed at the symbols, quivering with subdued emotions. Their leader raised a handkerchief to her eyes, but at last, with a mighty effort, recovered her self-command.

"No doubt you are all aware of May's arrival, with that reprehensible pastime of 'hanging May-baskets' in her train?" she continued.

There was a dramatic giggle. "We are!"

"I have certain information, ladies, *certain* information, that one of our number — one before indicated to you — has been selected as a victim to the Spirit of May by her most devoted votaries! Shall you permit her to be sacrificed? *Must* there be another Iphigenia?" she asked tragically, while a sympathetic thrill swept through the Leagued Nine.

"I will not waste our time by empty speech. To action! but first I will justify ourselves by plain

proof, and to that effect will summon witnesses. Examining Sister, call Susie Waters."

Susie came forward promptly, a bright-eyed girl, with a certain air of alertness, and a fine forehead half-concealed with fluffy hair. She spoke with a curious little drawl that was considerably at variance with her character; and the color came and went in her dimpled cheeks almost with every breath.

"Please state what you know of this Catiline-like plot?" said the Examining Sister, as Katie sank majestically into her seat.

"I noticed that the Millers' Club seemed to be much exercised in mind at recess to-day," Susie laughed. "They kept holding little confabs in the corners, as though they were plotting mischief, and looking over at us; but when any of us came near they hushed up and tried to look innocent. But I — happened — to pass when they did not see me, and just caught these words: 'I'll get the tissue-paper.'"

There was a slight sensation. The girls began to look more interested.

"Who uttered them?" demanded the Examining Sister.

"Fred Parker."

"That will do. Call Fannie Nason," interrupted Katie.

"I went into Miss Whitney's store to match a ribbon, and caught Master Fred matching tissue-paper!" said Fannie, with a flash of her dark eyes. "The moment that he saw me — and that was before I was out of the doorway — he was buying a lead-pencil instead; but I had seen what I had seen. Besides, Miss Whitney told me of it afterward, and that he tucked it into his pocket the instant that I touched the latch."

"Did he look confused?" asked the Examining Sister.

"Not he! He was as cool as a well — and as deep. He did not even color, but just bowed and said, 'Hullo!' and went out whistling as calm and serene as the summer sky!" and Fannie looked highly indignant at such duplicity.

It was thought rather inconsistent in her, as she was a capital little actress herself.

"Ladies," said Kate, "it is now made evident that they have obtained supplies. We shall presently see against whom their effort is directed. Call Nelly Miller."

A short, dumpy girl with glasses came forward and gave her evidence:

"I sit when at school by the middle aisle, nearest the boys, and Jack Arlington and Fred Parker are

between me and the window. You know I am a little deaf, and have learned to read words upon the lips. Well, Fred has a — a very expressive — mouth" — she stopped, and turned a little red as a giggle ran around; but all were too much interested to tease. "By turning my head a little way I could see by the reflection in my glasses what was going on behind me; and I distinctly saw Fred say, 'We'll hang Katie Powers one to-morrow night, if no more.'"

"Think of it, ladies!" cried Katie, her dark cheek blushing vividly as though she had never had a basket in her life, instead of her room being as full as a Sioux wigwam is with scalps.

"And Jack nodded and shook his head threateningly at you," concluded Nelly with a laugh. "And he gave a little scowl, so, and showed his white teeth. I think he hasn't forgotten last year yet."

Her laugh had an echo — a good many of them.

Katie's eyes danced at certain reminiscences. She tried hard to preserve her gravity, but it was of no use; and leaning back she laughed and laughed, until she fairly cried.

"It's useless, girls: I really cannot control myself when I think of his blank face when we surprised him at the very door! Gather close now. We've found the chance to be even with them for all the

pranks they have played on us the last term. If my plans will only work as they ought, and not go flying off on a boomerang, or twist around in some unheard-of way, we can capture the whole Club in the act; and then won't we just have fun!"

They all laughed again, in a way that chilled a certain person not here to be mentioned. They did not enact a Feejee war-dance — oh, no! They did not turn the room into a sanctuary of whirling dervishes, till the eye could not tell whether it was girls or whirligigs!

They would have you believe that it was the most stately of club minuets that made the dust fly out so from under the door that a certain tall figure sneezed his loudest. They were making too much noise to hear him, but the nameless one heard himself; and instead of saving us from tribulation, he sought cover for the next five minutes like a startled hare.

Katie might have heard him, after all. Those little ears tucked away under the waving hair were wonderfully keen sometimes. What more she had to say was in a low tone, and spoken rapidly; and when she finished there was another whirligig.

"Oh, this is something worth while! I'll at least pay master Tom for making fun of me in the reading class!" and Susie gave a vindictive dab of her tiny

fist at an imaginary head, much as a girl would be likely to — as though she had a hammer in her hand. A girl don't know how to strike from the shoulder! (*Opinion of the Millers' Club.*)

These two had been at swords-points all the spring, ever since she had asked Tom the old conundrum: why was her hair like one of Dickens' novels; and instead of hearing "Because it was all-of-a-twist," he had audaciously answered that it was "Because 'twas an old curiosity-shop!"

"It seems almost too bad!" said Carrie, regretfully, "they'll be teased so. Just think how poor Jack caught it last year. Girls, lets not do any such wholesale thing!"

"Oh, nonsense, Carrie!" laughed Kate, "I think they can stand it; and if there were no risks, the whole idea would be dreadfully stupid; they wouldn't do it if there was nothing to be dared as a penalty. Come, beloved Twin, promise me that you will not go straight like a little goose and betray us all."

"I don't believe we'll catch Fred Parker, anyway," observed Milly Winter, with an air of patience and long-suffering provoked by the memories of numerous past failures.

"Well, I'm rather afraid not, too," said Katie, candidly. "He seems to bear a charmed life. I

A FIJI WAR DANCE? OH, NO!

have always thought that he was with Jack last year, but if he was he went like a shadow, for we never really saw him. I would give more to catch him at it than any other boy in town!"

"Didn't you *ever* see him?" asked Susie, rather astonished. "I thought that he hung you one regularly every year."

Katie colored a little.

"Yes-s;" she said slowly, "sometimes I have seen him; but there isn't a girl in town, or a boy either, I suppose, who can catch him in a fair chase. We mustn't give *him* any chances; we all must have that specially in mind. Our triumph will not be complete without the chief offenders — and he'll be pretty sure to be chosen to do the hanging," she added shrewdly.

"There are not half enough of us," remarked Fanny Nason discontentedly; "they will go through us like the wind, and just leave us looking at each other like simpletons!" and the little gypsy's eyes flashed irately at the mere thought.

"Oh, I propose asking the whole class over to my house to-morrow night, very privately of course," said Katie with a gay laugh, and a pirouette across the room.

"For I'm to be Queen of the May, mother,
I'm to be Queen of the May!"

And then for the next five minutes — a hubbub.

"What are you going to do with your captives, Kate, when you have them?" asked May Wylie, a little anxiously; her brother was likely to be one, and she was in some doubt as to how far she ought to allow this to go without warning him.

"First catch your hare, my dear, then — stuff it, the cookery-books say; thus will I! We'll take them in, get up some kind of an ordeal to improve their appetites, banquet them, dismiss them with our blessing, and to-morrow — bulletin!"

"Tell Bert Edwards about the banquet and you won't have much trouble catching him," remarked Fanny.

"No; he'd risk the bulletin and everything else. I wish he wasn't so fearfully strong. It would take us all to hold him alone. Oh, I have it! we'll have some ropes and tie them as we catch them. And how Jack and Fred will fume when they are tied! I don't believe the rest will care much, but I know that Fred, at least, is as proud as a grand seignior; he will be just raving!" and she laughed wickedly at the discomfort of soul that in imagination was being meted out to the two principal offenders.

"What makes you so very severe against them, Kitty?" asked Milly Winter. "I know that you

are the reigning divinity of the whole club. Tom declares openly that you are the only girl in town worth having — with a mental reservation in Susie's favor;" which innuendo made that young lady color wrathfully. "And — Charlie, well, I won't betray him, as he is my brother; but Bert worships you dumbly, Jack would fight any one who breathed a word against you, and Fred would go three miles any day, to do you a favor, unasked; while he wouldn't go three steps for any one else, unless it were Carrie, perhaps; that is, unless we asked him, of course. Yet here you are consigning them all to the most ignominious punishment, without a pang. What ingratitude!"

Katie looked a little conscience-stricken.

"Yes, I know. I suppose I am a trifle bad to treat them so. But I don't like them any the less," she remarked with refreshing candor; and then with a most matronly air, "Boys are so conceited, generally, that it is a blessing to them to be taken down occasionally; and as the Millers' Club is the pick of the school, they have a nice chance of being spoiled; therefore —"

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTORS AND CAPTIVES.

IN the mean time we went about our business. Examinations were in order, and our evenings were spent in hard study.

Jack was the best mathematician; Tom was authority on Latin and Greek; Charlie looked out all doubtful questions of grammar, and I handled the lexicon. Bert was not particularly strong in anything.

By thus systematizing our work we managed to go over the whole ground of the previous month in a few evenings; and as all hard points had been carefully noted when we first met them, they were cleared with our united efforts, and even Bert was better prepared than he ever expected to be. We had fought our daily lessons separately; but when examinations came on, we brought up the reserves, and concentrated for the mutual good.

"There!" cried Tom, flinging the Virgil upon the table with a slam, as he finished the last line of the month, "now then, hooray for liberty!"

"Out with the tissue-paper!" sang Jack, kicking over his chair, and cutting an impromptu pigeon-wing. "Out with the tissue-paper, in with the books! Bring me, ye winged winds, my paste-pot and the shears!"

Bert wasn't a winged wind, nor anything like it; but he brought the desired implements with a placid smile.

"What's the design, Jack?" asked Tom, curiously. Our chief was always brimming with ideas, but we had been promised an extra effort of imagination for this occasion.

"Patience, my son!" said Jack, dreamily. "Little boys should be seen, not heard. One of you help Fred cut some of that paper into fringe, and the rest of you crimp it."

We went to work with a will on our paper, and there was soon a heap of crimps upon the table, enough for a dozen baskets, I thought.

"Come, Jack, haven't we got enough?"

But Jack was still looking into the fire, a perfectly rapt expression upon his face, a sheet of cardboard on his knee.

"Gone to sleep!" said Tom, saucily. "Stir him up, Charlie, you are the nearest!"

Charlie respectfully declined. But Jack suddenly turned his back to us, and began draughting rapidly; then dropping his pencil, he seized the shears. A few vigorous snips, a twist or two, half a dozen pins here and there for fastening, then he whirled around with a cheer and held it up before our delighted eyes — only the skeleton of a frame, shaky and incomplete — but to our experienced crowd full of unbounded possibilities.

It was a four-post, canopied bedstead!

"There, boys, how's that?" he asked triumphantly:

> "I am Ozymandias, king of kings!
> Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

We looked; we despaired, too! we roared with laughter. But it had a serious side.

"Jack, are you really going to hang that thing?" drawled Bert. "It will be risky; if we should happen to be caught we'd have the whole school singing 'Put me in my Little Bed' for the next half-year!"

"That is our lookout, you know!" was Jack's answer, as he dextrously dipped a bit of crimps in

A FOUR-POST, CANOPIED BEDSTEAD.

the paste, and applied it with an artistic eye to effect, continuing the process until the whole body was one mass of parti-colored fuzz.

"I said," said he, "that I would make things howl

this year, and if this don't wake the enemy I don't know what will. Pass me some more crimps, some of you."

The canopy was put on; the corner pillars strengthened with cedar splints and spiralled with fringe; a cotton mattress and pillow were added, and tissue-paper sheets, and the thing was complete. Afterward we added streamers.

Jack held it up proudly for inspection.

"What you going to put in it?" asked Tom, meditatively. "We always have had candy, but somehow this needs a doll, don't it?"

"You're right, brother Miller," said Jack; and he smilingly took a stick of candy from his pocket. "Here, Fred, cut out a wardrobe for this sweet being, while I make a head. Be sure and leave a bunch of paper for a neck."

Taking an oval, red-sugared almond from another pocket, and a bit of cloth, he cut out a tiny hood for it, whipped out a needle from his "possible sack" and sewed it on, and then sewed the hood to the paper neck.

"There!" She's a trifle red in the face, but we will call it a blush and forgive it. Now, Fred, you are the best draughtsman in the crowd; just sketch a face on that's near like Katie Powers' as you can, and

the victory is complete, at least until hanging time."

I did my level best, and the result rather astonished me. Loud and long the rafters of the old mill rang as we all leaned back and laughed, until, Cassandra-like, I remarked, with Pat once upon a time:

"It's a moighty foine thing that we had our laugh first."

We wanted to start straightway, but Jack vetoed that.

"It's too late; you forget it is a mile and a half to Katie's, and over the river at that; we had not planned it for to-night, either. Now, fellows, as Charlie lives nearest we will meet there instead of here at the mill, at sharp seven, dropping in accidentally, you know. I wish you could send Millie out of the way."

"She'll be out at Susie Waters'," said Charlie. "They get their lessons together half the time."

Jack looked relieved.

"I was afraid that she might smell a mice, and scamper off to the others. That's the bother of having sisters!" And here Jack looked superior; he didn't have any.

"They are all sisters to you, Jack — you rather seem to like *that* sort," remarked Tom.

Jack turned red, but for all that, smiled brightly.

His was the Arab's idea of a gentleman. Their word for it, when translated, is "A brother of girls"! I doubt whether our chief ever suspected how we all honored him in our secret thoughts—that he was the ideal of his uproarious followers.

We met at Charlie's. Millie was away, as he predicted, so the field was clear. But one thing had already struck me. There seemed to be a great many girls on the street that evening, walking arm in arm, and some of them I caught looking at me stealthily, in a way that I could not account for; and a vague suspicion that all was not right was growing upon me.

At last I hinted something of my uneasiness to the others, but they only made game of what they called my "sudden development of self-conceit."

"All right, fellows!" I cried at last, with some heat. "But if any one is caught it will *not* be me!"

They remembered that afterward.

As soon as it was safely dark we sallied forth silently, keeping along the hedges, and dodging into shadow at any noise. Jack carried the basket. We went through the village easily and reached the bridge, where Bert stopped to swear the tollman to secrecy.

"You'd better take keer," the man remarked with a

comical twist of the mouth as he went in. "A hull slew o' girls went through here 'bout half 'n hour back."

I could not help but smile, and the rest looked at each other doubtfully.

"Never mind, boys! they hardly think of surrounding us, and anyhow we can scatter an' take to the fields if the worst comes!" said Charlie pluckily.

Diving into the darkness of the bridge we walked soft and swiftly, with a long swinging tread that carried us well along our way in a very few minutes. Nothing could be heard save our muffled tramp in the dusty road; even the frogs were still in the ditches.

"It's too still!" whispered Bert, who had been reading Cooper, and had his head full of Indian lore. "It's so still you can almost see silence!"

We crept along through the night until the quaint outlines of a giant birch loomed up dimly in the darkness, solitary sentinel of a fork in the road; here Jack held up his hand, and we halted.

"It's not safe to go further in a crowd," he said. "Let the rest stay here, and Fred and I will do the deed. Be ready to run now when you hear the signal, for we shall come like streaks, and there will probably be a dozen after us, according to the toll-man." And drawing the basket from beneath his

coat, he affectionately smoothed the wrinkles from the "tails."

Tom gave us a solemn benediction, and we took leave amid a show of feeling most affecting, and running lightly past the church, that provokingly threw its shadow in precisely the wrong direction, we crept on in the shadow of the elms till the blurred mass of the house appeared, and soon we were crouching down beside the gate.

Jack bent to my ear:

"Fred, don't try to open it—it creaks!"

I chuckled, and nodded.

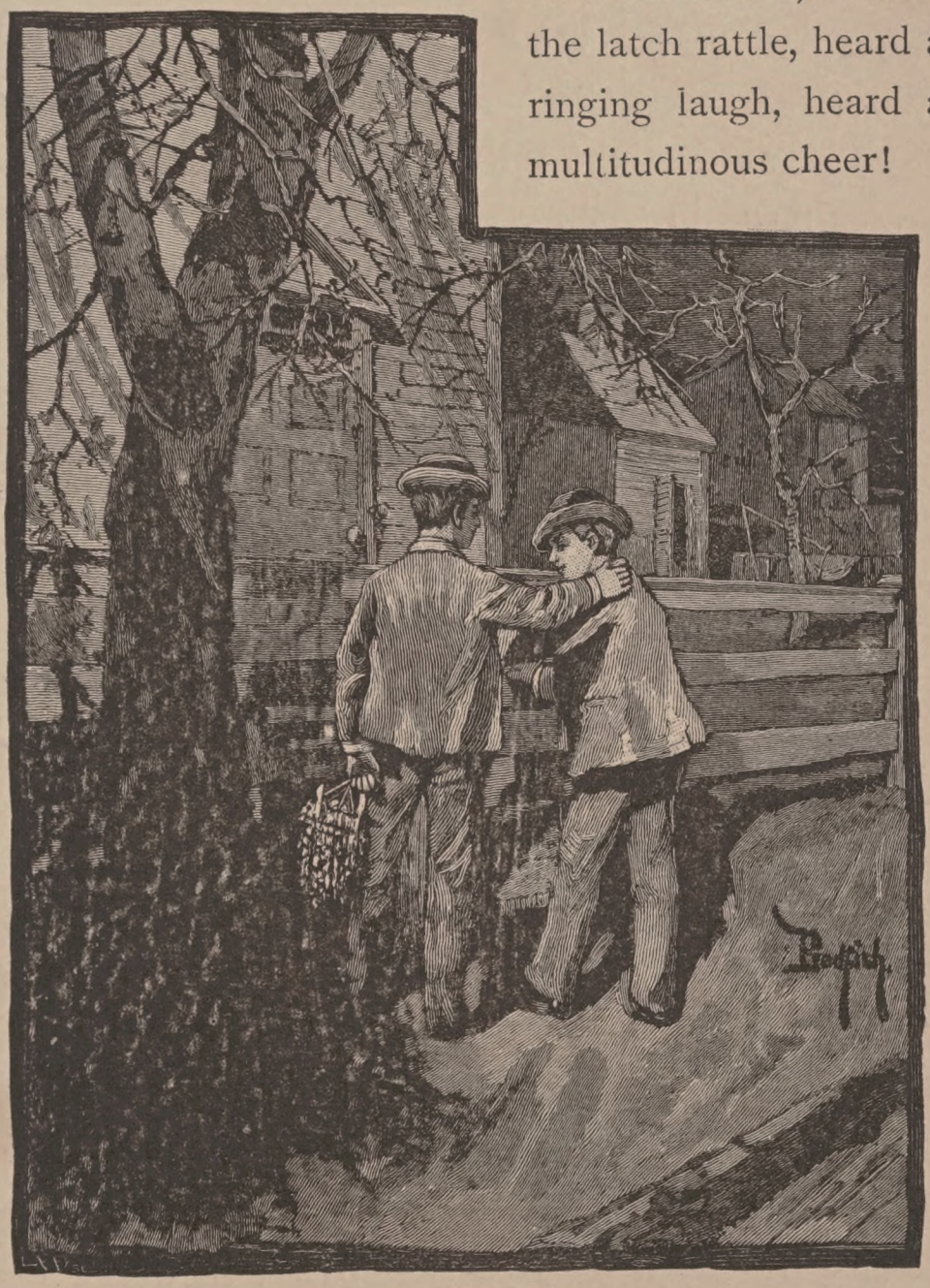
"How did *you* know?"

I could not see his face in the darkness, but I saw his shoulders go up like a Frenchman's. I began to understand how he came to be bulletined last year.

He consented that I should be the storming party. I soon found a familiar breach, and carefully squeezed through. Jack handed me the basket; it rustled fearfully loud; in fact, to my nervous ear, everything seemed to crash, yet I doubt if any of my movements could be heard ten feet away.

Stepping on tiptoe across to the steps, I mounted them, tremulously dropped the loop over the door-knob, gave one vigorous pull at the bell, and on the

instant whirled and sprang away for my life. Even while in mid-air, I heard the latch rattle, heard a ringing laugh, heard a multitudinous cheer!



"IT CREAKS!"

With a mighty wrench Jack tore the sticky gate

open, slammed it after me as I shot through, and with a whistle like a locomotive grasped my hand and flashed down the road at a terrific pace. "Easy, Jack!" I remonstrated, after we had gone at a killing rate for some thirty rods. "Don't waste any strength!"

For answer he threw up his head like a startled stag. "Listen!"

Down the road, delayed doubtless by the clinging gate, the rapid beat of a dozen light feet came faintly through the still night air, growing louder and clearer, drawing nearer and nearer in spite of the pace we already ran.

"This won't do, Fred!" cried Jack. "I'll signal them once more, and then every man for himself."

And drawing his signal whistle, this time he blew a sharp note.

It was answered by another whistle—a strange one—behind us! Then we saw the boys in the dusk ahead leap away with a sudden spurt. Around the bend, past the great birch, over the brook we sped, until the black cavern of the bridge towered up through the darkness, and still we had not overtaken them, although we had gained a dozen rods since they first hove in sight. We could even see Tom running with his short, quick stroke, Charlie

leaping on as though a mass of springs, instead of muscles, light as a feather, while Bert was pounding away doggedly, with a staying power that served him well. He was not as swift as they, but he could keep it up.

Suddenly a shrill metallic whistle cut the air. It sounded right ahead of us, as if blown in our very faces.

Jack glanced round at me, and the next instant a crowd of girls appeared in the very entrance of the bridge as though by magic, and we saw Tom, Bert and Charlie, all three, run plump into their open arms!

We managed to stop dead in the midst of our tremendous race.

Before us the way was blocked; behind, Katie and the rest were coming on at an easy gait, laughing and panting with their hard run, perfectly and comfortably sure of us. On one side the high bank of the cut extended from a long distance back to the very edge of the bluff that overhung the river; and now from over the low wall that guarded the other side came tumbling and rushing still another line of girls with shrieks of laughter, already stretching out their hands. I saw cords in them — and I saw beyond! I could see the bulletin ɔard of the next

day. The whole class were out to compass the complete humiliation of the haughty Millers' Club.

"Jack!" I whispered desperately, "you can do as you like, but I won't be caught! I never have been yet, and I shan't begin now. I'd rather swim the river!"

The ice was hardly out of it yet, and it was fully a hundred and thirty yards wide, black and gurgling.

"I'm with you, Fred!" said Jack, sullenly. He *had* been caught, and he knew all about it.

We wheeled, and with a sudden dart we were down and running like cats along the crumbling shelf beneath the bank. A whole chorus of cries went up. The girls had heard the leap. But the ditch saved us. They hesitated at that, and before they had crossed it we were already among the bushes. A heavy log lay there; I remembered seeing it a few days before. Jack was for going over the bluff head-first, when I made a grab at him. "Hold on, Jack!" I whispered in a low tone. "Throw this in."

He looked at me for just a breath, uncomprehendingly; then he laughed, suddenly — gleefully!

There rose on the air then a sounding splash; there was a sound of puffing and blowing; something dark floated down upon the swift current; then all was still, save the slight cracking of the

WITH A SUDDEN DART WE WENT DOWN.

bent bushes as they sprang back into place. That also ceased.

The girls came thronging along through the gap, perfectly aghast. Tom and Charlie were with them, but Bert was nowhere to be seen.

"If only you had not jumped out so quickly!" mourned Katie, as she peered through the dusk at the dark object, now caught by an eddy and thrown well out toward the middle of the river.

"But how could we help it?" flashed a voice, and there was a wrathful stamp of a foot among the drift-wood. "There they were, right before us, and a second's delay might have spoiled all, for we were but just in time to catch the others as it was. We supposed, of course, they were all together. Next time you may do your own catching, Katie Powers!"

"You don't suppose that they will drown, do you?" asked some one suddenly.

"I don't know!"

And I saw Katie look white at the very thought. I suppose that the idea that by her madcap prank she perhaps had driven two of her best friends to their death, sent something of a chill quivering to her heart!

It seemed a lifetime before any one spoke.

They stood there, mute and motionless, gazing

with clasped hands, listening until they probably could hear their own heartbeats.

Some one gave a low sob — a choking sound.

The boys could stand it no longer. They broke into a broad laugh.

"Drowned! not they!" cried Tom. "They are clear across the river by now."

There was a great revulsion of feeling among the girls. Some laughed and others cried, but a sudden movement near him showed Tom that he had been slightly indiscreet.

"It's no use to try to catch them now," he added, still devoutly hoping that we were out of reach, but in considerable doubt of the fact. "They will be at home before you can reach the other side."

"What geese we've been!" was Katie's remark, in a mortified and exasperated tone. "I might have known that Fred would get away, and he was the one we wanted most. He always does get clear in every scrape, somehow!" she added discontentedly, as they slowly picked their way back toward the road. "But, never mind, we have three of you."

As soon as they began to move, and would thus cover the sound, we ran along the ledge to the other side of the bridge, climbed up through a hole in the

boarding, and stood erect in the roadway as dry as they were.

"Is that you, fellows?" whispered a voice.

We turned, startled.

"Why, it's Bert, and tied, as I'm a sinner!" Jack threw back his head for a hearty laugh, but I clapped my hand hastily over his mouth.

"Fact!" he whispered in a smothered tone as he passed through some inward convulsion that shook him all over, and ran quivering away down into his boots. "I forgot where we were; where is your knife, Fred?"

"I have one!" whispered Bert, hoarsely, in an agony of suspense, hearkening to the returning voices. "Do hurry up!"

I laughed enjoyingly under my breath, and stood looking at him with my hands on my hips, shaking all over.

"Bert is really in haste for once! Was he afraid he'd be bulletined, and was he tied like a lamb led to the altar?"

Bert groaned, "Don't hit a fellow when he is down. They are almost to the road already. Do cut me loose!"

It was growing a little warm, and we found the knife and severed the cords. It was a piece of ratline

that they had used. They had a high appreciation of Bert's strength.

"Now then, travel!" said Jack.

It was time; for in the light of the rising moon which was now streaming athwart the bridge through every crack and knot-hole, and flooding field and road, we could see the enemy, with little squeaks of fright jumping the ditch, or standing in dismay upon the verge. It was not so easy to jump back in cold blood.

"Let's *not* run," said Bert. "It is too light; let's climb up among the beams and see 'em go by."

Well, we would certainly be safe there, even if discovered; and seizing the hint, away we swarmed up among the trestle-work, and flattened ourselves like lizards along the great centre-beam, amid the dust of years. We were not a moment too soon. Scarcely had we settled ourselves when the girls came trooping through, and great was the lamentation when they found their prisoner gone.

"How on earth could that boy break through so thick a cord?" cried somebody. "I thought it would hold them all!"

Tom glanced at the loose ends, showing cleanly cut in the moonlight, started, and with a comical

squint at the discomfited girls whispered something to Charlie.

Charlie looked bright in turn, and eyed the rope. Then they both shook with suppressed merriment which rose superior to their present misfortune, and finally broke forth beyond all bounds.

"Oh, you may laugh, Tom Wylie, but we have *you* at all events!" retorted Susie Waters. "I don't think that *you* will break away!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh dear! it isn't that, but — oh-ho! ho! ho! — it's *cut!* Jack Arlington cut it while you were holding a wake over your supposed Leander. Sold again, Katie! They didn't swim the river after all, but ran around to the other side while you were poking about! Hurrah for our worthy chief!" and our fellows both cheered with a vim.

"Impossible!" cried Katie Powers, snatching up the cords.

"Well, see for yourself!" And with a cheerful smile Tom shrugged his shoulders at her disbelief.

This was "the most unkindest cut of all."

If we had swum the river she could have borne it, for it would be an escape so unheard of as to be impossible to foresee. But to be outwitted in this barefaced manner was too much for the equanimity

of an angel, and — I am sorry to have to state it, but Katie undeniably sulked.

They bore off their prisoners, however, and what happened during their captivity no mortal ever revealed. No power of persuasion could tempt them. An ominous silence forever prevailed.

Jack and I had our theories, however. We rather guessed that they had to stand the brunt for our iniquities as well as their own. Indeed, Katie let out as much inadvertently one day, but an imploring look from Tom set them all a-laughing, and not another word would they say, to our great disgust, simply remarking that "they could keep a secret, girls as they were."

Still we had our revenge. The boys were bulletined, as a matter of course; but our daring escape and our rescue of Bert made so much talk, and brought such ridicule upon their captors, that they were hardly noticed, and thus escaped lightly. On the other hand, the columns of the *Gem* teemed with pertinent inquiries and sarcasms, for we enlisted the services of the sharpest pens in school, always delighted to find a weak point in the enemy's armor, and as they had many grievances of their own to avenge, the last hour of the weekly meetings of the Lyceum saw a hall full of school-folk simply con-

vulsed with laughter, the paper being read from the rostrum, not printed.

Indeed, so little notice was taken of the bulletin, and so unavailing were their efforts to use it as a lightning-rod to divert attention from themselves, that Katie at last pulled down the notice board in a fit of vexation, and threw it into the fire, declaring that the old glory had departed, and that, for her part, she would never, never, never, post another name.

As she kept her word, the custom was gradually forgotten, until now but few would remember that it ever had existed in Zethel, unless they had suffered from it themselves.

Jack does.

You ask him!

CHAPTER V.

ALL ON A SATURDAY.

AND the June days came, with the long, cool twilights under the trees; with the softened breeze whispering overheard, and the tall grass bending in the meadows; with the bobolinks swaying on the lilies, the wild duck among the rushes, gamey trout in every mountain stream, and the shark-like pickerel in the great river.

These are the days when the hum of the class-room grows far away; when you look straight through the map-covered walls, out into the wildwood, whispering mechanically page after page of well-worn histories, while your soul goes out to roam among the shadows of the thickets; when the lazy drone of the flies up and down the pane seems an unaccountable call to flee to the forest fastnesses. To us club-boys, upon whom tasks at home held a lien, these first June

A ZETHEL TWILIGHT.

days were full of frettings ; for what boy can see the beauty of a Saturday spent in weeding onions, with the distant shouts of more mature ball-players echo-

ing from the common, or the prospective gain in spading a garden when he should be digging fishing-worms ?

We were seldom up at the mill now by day. The dusk found us there occasionally, but more often on the green, mossy banks of the old canal ; we left the mill for rainy days and winter time.

One Friday, word was passed to meet early at the old bridge the next day ; and a stir ran around the school-room. There were some remarkable answers given in the recitations that followed, and a general absent-mindedness was noted ; for it was the first summons since the " hanging."

Even the girls seemed to know that something was up ; their club had rather died out from lack of an object, after its one great effort ; but we were still at war as corporations.

As usual, I was the first upon the ground, living somewhat nearer than the rest, and going to the *rendez-vous* through the woods and across lots. Throwing myself down upon a mossy bank, I gazed dreamily along the water, thinking busily of nothing ; watching the whirligig flies in their mazy dance upon the sunlit surface, this way and that, weaving fantastic figures in the silvery light.

A frog leaped with a sullen " tchug ! " into the depths,

THINKING BUSILY OF NOTHING.

and reappearing, began to make his way steadily up the gentle current, using both propellers alternately, with his bright eyes alert for a wayside fly. Then he struck a swifter eddy, and with a smothered groan

of resignation lowered his pointed nose to the level of the water, closed his eyes, and with a long, slow stroke forged along, leaving a string of bubbles in his wake; every half minute he raised his head to make sure of his bearings. At last the two little turret-like eyes grew indistinct, and finally disappeared around the bend. I watched him sleepily to the last, then sought something new.

A woodpecker dropped on the rotting sleepers of the old bridge, and began to hammer away for grubs, his steady "*rap! rap! rap!*" echoing through the birches. He had a red head, and his wings were speckled. Suddenly he gave a shrill whistle; a start, a flutter, and he was rods away in the top of a giant pine, as the boys came crashing through the brush fence, hot and dusty, and dropped in their turn upon the bank.

Not on the bridge; for that rustic specimen of architecture was now so ancient and little used, narrowed by the loss of a sagging board from time to time, that it was hardly safe for a mosquito. We had been on the point of destroying it a dozen times; yet as it was not our bridge, but in the pasture of a certain warm-tempered citizen instead, various prudential reasons had restrained us.

Without a word of greeting, as I came out of my

corner Jack flung his hat into the bushes, and leaping out of his clothes as if by magic, plunged head-first into the deepest hole in the stream. Splash! splash! splash! and six or eight irregular plunges followed him as so many white streaks flashed in the sunlight for an instant, and vanished in the water until it foamed with the sudden strokes. Nearly a minute passed before they all came up together, rods away, puffing like porpoises, each with a handful of sand in his fist, to prove that he had touched bottom, which he lost no time in applying to his neighbor's face.

And then began a sod-fight, grim and earnest! The air was full of turf flying back and forth, splashing in the water till it became of inky blackness, and the white-armed warriors were white no more. Then they turned upon me. I dodged a heavy sod just in time, as it came flip-flap over the leaves, filling my neck with sand. It stirred my ire; and tossing the scattered clothing into a little arbor that we had hollowed under a scrubby bush, out of sight and harm's way, off went my clothes, crash went my boots among the limbs, and I rushed into the fray like an ancient Berserker!

Jack was defending himself valiantly against their combined energies, with his back to a stump, when I came to the rescue with a whoop.

A heavy sod completely routed Tom, another sent Charlie to the rear, and Bert dodged until my ammunition gave out; and after a random gun or so, and a clean dip further up stream, we climbed out in the sun to dry, panting and laughing as we dropped on the grassy slope.

"I say, fellows, what are we here for, anyway?" said Bert, suddenly remembering the mysterious summons, and sitting up. "You started it, Jack; now what's the idea?"

Jack's answer was an inquiry as to how much money we could raise. We took an account of stock instantly.

"We're pretty rich, after all," he remarked with satisfaction. "Now then, what do you say to clubbing together and getting my cousin, Will Gannet, to send us a lot of fireworks from Portland for the Fourth, you know?"

"Humph! that all?" sniffed Bert, discontentedly.

"Keep cool, bub!" laughed Jack, which advice was rather unnecessary, as the water was still running in streams from Bert's hair. "Boys," he went on, "do you remember what Mr. Brown was explaining to the philosophy class last night about coal gas? Well, we can have lots of fun out of that! Have any of you an old gun-barrel?"

Bert had; and I had another.

"Can any one else scare up an old tea-kettle? We shall want two."

"I can," said Bert; "but what on earth are you going to do with a tea-kettle, Jack? Not celebrate Boston Harbor, are you?"

There was a laugh at that, in which Bert good-naturedly joined; once, way back in the district school, he had been punished for declaring that the famous tea had been spilled by "Pokey Hontas, chief of the Penobscot Indians;" and it was a standing joke even now.

"Not exactly," chuckled Jack; "I have, somewhere among my traps, an old balloon, as large as a hogshead; it struck me that we might blow it up, tie a lot of fireworks to a hoop beneath the car, and send it up at night. How's that?"

"Can we do it, though?" asked Tom, doubtfully.

"Do it! Why, we'll take the tea-kettles, fill them full of powdered coal, and wire down the covers; stick the gun-barrels in the nozzles, and plaster clay all over the whole. Then all we have to do is to put them in a big fire, with a tube, an old hose, or something of that sort that will lead the gas away to a safe distance, and we can store it in a condenser till we get enough. That is, if the whole thing doesn't

blow us all to the North Pole together," he wound up coolly. "Hullo, though! What's that? Fred, my love, just run up the bank and take an observation; I heard something!"

I scrambled up the steep incline, gave one look, turned, and came down at full jump, landing all in a heap.

"Boys; there are more than forty girls not five rods off, and heading—straight—this—way!"

There was a panic; instinctively we turned to Jack; he was equal to the emergency—he always was.

"Quiet! quiet! under the bridge, fellows," he uttered, gliding into the water without a splash. "Quiet! quiet!" and he ducked under the surface and vanished from sight.

Without a sound we slipped into the water after him, clutched desperately at our noses as we ducked our heads under, and disappeared in turn beneath the old stringers which had sagged until they were within an inch or two of the foam-flecked current. We often had practised that while playing "Indians," and not a ripple was left to tell the tale to the passer-by.

Stray fragments of talk now came wafted through the still air. The fence cracked; a scream followed a louder crash, and then a chorus of laughter. Someone said something that we did not catch, and then

there was a jumble of words, so tangled that there was no connection; Tom irreverently called it "gabble." We could tell by the sound that they were coming toward the stream, and a curious hush fell upon the group of boys beneath the bridge.

School-girl gossip like a flood of sunshine came down in a steady flood, and not a few remarkable opinions, which we hugely relished. "Oh, girls!" — we started convulsively, for it seemed over our heads — "girls, come here, quick! Oh, *what* a lot of checkerberries!"

Tom groaned softly.

"Now that they've found that knoll, they'll camp down for the next hour! What'll we do, Jack? I've got a big cramp in my left hip already."

Jack glared at him and shook his head — there was just room enough beneath sleeper, plank and water for him to do it in — and Tom subsided; but we might have made a small earthquake under there for a moment or two, unnoticed, for the screams of delight overhead as each one plumped down where she thought were the best pickings, were astonishing. Then there was silence for a minute, as they got in some steady work.

"What was that about your scare, last night,

Carrie? I heard a little of it at second-hand," said somebody.

Jack gave a curious little start, and turned half around as though he would have run if he could; then he settled back again.

"Oh, did you hear? I was so frightened!" came down in a shuddering tone. "It was down below the railroad, at Alder River bridge; I had been up by the Russells' you know, after some ferns and things, and had my apron full of acorn-cups, and bits of bark to make brackets of, and a beautiful great piece of birch-bark for pictures; I was crossing the bridge, singing away to myself, when one of those dreadful river-drivers — a Frenchman, too! — came up and spoke to me, and oh, *how* I did scream! and dropped my things right in the road; and girls," she added solemnly, "I — really — believe — I — I was almost dead with fright when that dear blessed Jack Arlington came up the bank like a thunderbolt, with his face looking as mad as — as I don't know what! He never touched that fence when he came over, and the Frenchman walked on. I don't suppose he meant any harm by his good-evening, but I just trembled like a leaf; and Jack was *so* kind!"

Oh for a chance to laugh! There was a sensation under that bridge. Poor Jack! his face was as red

as fire as we all turned and smiled at him.

"*So* kind!" I murmured.

Souse went my head under water, without the least warning, with a strong hand on the back of my neck, and both eyes and nose filled and smarting. Well, he plays with the tiger who jests with royalty; so I struggled up in silence in order to hear more.

"Oh, I wish, I *wish* you could have seen him, girls!" went on the enthusiastic little chronicler overhead. "He looked so splendid and brave! He was wet, and muddy, and fishy too, and he hadn't any shoes on either; but he looked just like that picture of St. George for all that!"

There was a giggle. "O Carrie, you'll be the death of us yet, with your hero-worship!

"You needn't make fun of him!" cried the little maid, wrathfully, stamping her foot with vexation; and turning away from the scoffers in a pet, she suddenly ran down upon the rickety old bridge. The weight was more than it could bear, and down it sagged, almost into the water. One beam hit Jack squarely on top of the head, and Carrie unconsciously ducked her preserver as unceremoniously as he had me. I felt quite happy for several moments.

There was a subdued smile around me; it was becoming too ridiculous!

"How queer the water gurgles!" said somebody.

The "gurgle" grew louder, considerably.

"Yes, just see!" said Carrie; and to our horror she began to teter up and down, making the old bridge crack, quiver, and splash the water in the centre of the stream. There was a scramble toward the sides on our part; we knew too well how frail it was. But we were too late; a rotten old plank split in two just under her feet, and down they came with a scream upon Bert Edwards' broad back as the girls rushed down to her assistance, and then cr-r-rack! crash! splash! came the whole thing down upon our heads, stifling, ducking us without mercy!

"Quiet! quiet!" warned Jack, under voice, in the orchestra of screams from the bank; and swimming swiftly and silently under water, gliding like white shadows out of darkness, we faded away into the dense shade of the woods in the stream below. If a legion of Indians had been after us we could not have thrown in an extra stroke, neither have stayed under a fraction of a second longer. We just threw up our heads for a breath, and then ducked like muskrats again, until we were at least a hundred yards away, and around three bends; then Jack called a halt.

"HOW QUEER THE WATER GURGLES!" SAID SOMEBODY.

For the second time that day, we dropped upon the sward too much exhausted to do more than puff and laugh.

"What shall we do now, Jack?" demanded Bert, as he gazed around at his dripping fellow-mariners; "all our duds are up in the old bush!"

"Let them stay, they are safe enough; and we can go back after those precious checkerberries are eaten," Jack answered with a laugh. "See! there is a piece of the old bridge now."

We gazed with interest at the wreck as it drifted slowly past, shied a club or two at a frog which had gone a-voyaging on a floating board, and then fell to comparing bumps. We all had them; I got off very lightly, but some of the boys had bruised heads to show. We had a round laugh over Bert's, for he had two broad scratches, running from between his shoulders the whole length of his back, where Miss Carrie's little boot-heels had glanced along.

We lingered an hour or so, talking over the stampede, and then Jack sent three of us up to investigate; we found the coast clear, and signalled to that effect, which brought the rest up in high glee. It did not take long to dress, and we were soon marching down the road, the wounded with bandaged heads, and all discussing Jack's new idea.

It was adopted, of course. That was a foregone conclusion; and we voted to have everything at the old mill ready for work by the third of the month.

CHAPTER VI.

CELEBRATING.

"FRED! Fred!" The whisper came softly across the aisle as we took our seats for recitation in Virgil one morning.

"Yes!" with a swift glance for danger; whispering was *taboo*.

"I want to see you a minute at recess; can you —" an abrupt stop; we dodged into our books just in time to escape a reprimand.

As the teacher slowly promenaded down the room again, with his hands behind his back, and gazing meditatingly at the ceiling in the neighborhood of "Rogues' Corner," which had during the morning acquired a curiously warty appearance, I hastily nodded assent and resumed my Latin.

When the twenty-five minute recess came, I strolled carelessly over by one of the corner windows. Katie presently came over.

"Now then, Katie, what's the axe?" I asked mischievously. "You girls never condescend to be particularly friendly to a 'Miller' unless you have a little hatchet to grind;" and I gave a longing look out at the ball-ground.

Katie set her pearly little teeth for a moment, but bethought herself in time to remember that I didn't take kindly to scolding, and came to the point at once with commendable frankness and courage.

"Yes, I have an axe, Sir Civility, and it is very dull indeed. Fred, we girls want to be included in your Fourth of July. Now don't open your eyes so," she added a little confused. "Did you never think what a dull time of it we girls always have? It's just noise and powder-smoke all day, and somebody's burned fingers to do up. I'm tired of it, and it's been unusually dull for us this summer, and I thought I would just come and ask you about it. I always feel, Fred, that a girl *can* rely on you, if there is real need. And I *do* want you to consider us now."

Katie's soft, dark little hand on my arm quite bewildered me. But I thought upon the tea-kettle balloon; and besides, there were old accounts to settle. "Have you forgotten last May so soon?" I asked, grimly. "I seem to have a dim remembrance of various snares against my own personal peace of mind,

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and all the more vividly that I but very narrowly escaped!"

"Yes, I know; but still you did escape!" and here Katie laughed regretfully, without a sign of contrition. "And that being the case, you ought not to bring that up against me now, when I come to you in honest need. Won't you please, Fred, be our friend in this matter?" she asked wistfully. "I know it may seem a great deal of trouble, but it is so dull."

This was very hard work for the proud Katie, with me looking at her, and never helping her at any of the pauses and dashes. She ended with a little angry stamp, and turned to the window to hide quick tears of disappointment.

"O Jupiter Pluvius, don't do that!" I cried. "Really, I'll do the best I can for you, but I'm only one, and the boys have a plan already, and it can't be made to include girls. So you mustn't feel too sanguine — not for this year."

Just here the bell rang, and I — really I felt like a monster in human form as I saw Katie wiping her black eyes so pathetically. "But cheer up," I added. "I'll talk to Jack, and between us it will be queer if we don't find something for you; I have thought what a deprivation it must be for a girl to spend her days here, especially for one altogether

too dignified to flirt, and concoct mischievous little schemes of her own!"

Katie flashed her eyes at me for my impudent speech, but still gave me a grateful look as she went to her seat, and I felt for a few moments quite satisfied with myself; but I soon began to realize what I had promised, and the obstacles; and the longer I thought, the less I liked the situation.

"Confound it! the boys will think me a soft if I hint at such a thing!" It takes such a deal of courage for a boy to openly do certain gentle, kindly things. His fellows are merciless. Had I had only a sister, or even a cousin, to put in a plea for, it would have been a different matter. But for Katie Powers! I laughed aloud helplessly at my own plight; which feat, by the way, cost me six marks.

"What on earth are you about?" whispered Jack hurriedly, catching up his favorite inkstand to save it from my vandal hands, as I was abstractedly cramming it full of bits of paper, shredded fine.

I told him after school.

"Not a bad idea," he mused. "The fact is," he added confidentially as we were packing up our books, "the city fathers — that is to say, the selectmen, have sat down on our plan and flattened it completely. How they heard of it is more than I know, but hear

they did, and they say that there is danger of our balloon's coming down on a house-top or a haystack, and celebrating in quite another fashion. In this opinion I am inclined to think they are more than half right. I say!" he cried suddenly, "how would it do to take Newt Larkin's boat and row the two clubs up the river among the islands for the day, taking our fireworks of course? The bateau will just about hold us."

The plan looked inviting; but I declined to commit myself until we had sounded the boys, for *our* celebration had not been confined to the Millers' Club.

There was a jolly storm; the outsiders went off in a towering rage against the selectmen, the girls, and the world in general. Our fellows were reasonable, and only grumbled. Anyway, it could not be helped, for the bateau would be a snug fit for the two clubs, without any room for other folks. The girls were in high glee, and voted to bury all hatchets straightway.

The Fourth dawned — it usually does, I believe — and was ushered in with martial salutes. The crackers fizzed and cracked, the rockets hissed, and the cannon roared upon the green until it burst, nearly sending Jack and me to "The Land o' the Leal" as we sat on the fence near by, a hundred-pound frag-

ment crashing through the slats within six feet of us, and bringing up against an elm.

At the proper hour the two clubs met at the boat. We took our places at the oars in true Eastern style, amid a flourish of trumpets and a chorus of squeals, and Jack kicked over his dinner-pail. We expected that. Some one's provision-chest must be sacrificed at the outset of every picnic to appease the fates, or dire would be the consequences. The boat was just large enough — a great river-driver's bateau, sharp at both ends like a whale-boat, clumsy-looking but safe; made to fly like a duck over rapid and white water with a dozen or so of red-shirted lumbermen making it quiver beneath their strokes. It quivered now, too, for we had rowed together before, and with Katie at the helm we surged up against the current manfully until — gr-r-r-ride went the keel along a bar, when the mortified helmswoman was superseded without delay by Charlie. We boys had to out, though, and shove off, after which we proceeded without accident.

There was no such thing as silence aboard, and only once, as we turned into a shady creek, was there a break in the steady chatter; then May Wylie turned around for a last look across the river, and caught sight of something flashing in the light among the

islands where the sun glinted along the water. We all turned and looked at it — a long, low boat with two persons in it, sitting almost at the level of the stream.

"It's that new double canoe of the college chaps, I take it," remarked Tom, gazing with an admiring eye after the flying craft as it shot in behind the bend. "They say that it's made of sheet iron, with gas tanks in the ends; goes like sixty, doesn't it!" The next moment the boat grounded, and we forgot all about it, for we were at our landing.

"Eleven o'clock and dinner-time!"

Of course that was Bert; but none of us were sorry, and while I started a fire, and the girls "set the table" under a tree, the rest went foraging. Susie and I were to make the coffee, boil the eggs, and get dinner generally; but I had to do most of the cooking after all, for she was not up to camp-life, although rather proud of her accomplishments indoors.

What charms there are in true *al fresco* dining! What grand appetites! what berries, with the dew of the bushy dells still on them, and fish that leaped and surged around the lines within the half-hour! Who ever thinks afterward of aught but the pleasure? Who ever remembers the great army of the uninvited — the spiders, the fuzzy-legged caterpillars, the big blue flies that whirred around in the sunshine every-

where? I do remember one thing, though: those sapient girls spread their cloth and laid out the feast directly over some ant-hills!

After dinner, games. There was a cool breeze from the river, and the spot was shady.

"I Spy," all over the little island, "Chase the Squirrel," "Copenhagen"—for which we had brought a clothes-line—followed one another in quick succession; and finally Jack brought to Carrie a long package. After some urging she shyly opened it, produced a tiny violin and struck up a lively waltz.

This was a surprise. Not one of us, strange as it may seem, had even heard of that violin. Evidently not all of our chief's goings and comings had been made known to the club. There was a bright color in his cheeks, as well as in hers, as we gazed at them both in silence. How astonished Katie Powers looked, for instance. But the tones were sweet, true and irresistible. We sprang into line for an old-fashioned "Virginia Reel" upon the green, and Carrie sawed away with an energy that quite overcame her natural shyness, and set us all a-laughing.

Then we sat down for a rest under the trees, and tried something quieter. Forfeits were vetoed; so fishing out an old writing-book from my pack, and using plates and water-worn driftwood for tablets, we

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tore out several leaves and started a game of "Artists."

First we each of us drew a sketch — queer enough the sketches sometimes were — illustrating a quotation or an event in history or fiction. Then they were passed around, and each one in turn wrote at the foot of the page a conjecture as to what was the artist's thought, and folding it over that the next might not see, just as in "Consequences."

What wild shots were made! Fannie Mason was the most aggravating one in the crowd, for she quoted from speeches that never existed, and lines of poetry never written, until we rose in our might and called her a fraud and a humbug!

She made one fair hit, however; it was a little darky running for dear life toward a fence at a despairingly long distance away, with a mad bull after him — the whole illustrating the first half of the well-known line, "Millions for de-fence, but not one cent for tribute!"

The day wore on, as the best days will. Noon had become afternoon, and then came sunset and twilight, and we boys, setting up a board for a stand, sent off rockets, pin-wheels and Roman candles; and when the last cracker had cracked, and the last fiery meteor had hurtled upward with its startling rush,

burst, and vanished, leaving a shower of golden rain drifting slowly down the tranquil sky, we stepped aboard once more and shoved off.

Jack steered this time, with Katie and Carrie in front of him; I was stroke, Tom and Susie just behind me, and Bert and Charlie were lost somewhere forward among the girls; it was growing rather too dark to see.

We did not row, merely steadying the boat with a stroke or so, and in the deeper water drifted with the current down between the dusky shores. The waters lapped with soft ripples against the oars, and the faint wind whispered from the tall grasses alongshore, while far overhead a solitary night-hawk wheeled in unseen circles, sighing in saddened minor: "De-ar! de-ar!"

Jack drew out his flute and joined the hawk; then through the darkness rose the long slow notes of that sweetest of twilight songs, *Ave Sanctissima*, voice after voice softly creeping into the strain.

Then silence fell. Dreams came fast, unbidden, until it all became a dream. A voice whispered a note of poetry from the stern; it was Katie! She was leaning over the side, and trailing her fingers through the limpid water, watching the lights on shore.

"She has said 'yes,' and the world is a-smile!
There she sits as she sat in my dream.
There she sits, and the blue waves gleam
As the current bears us along the while,
For happy mile after happy mile,
A fairy boat on a fairy stream."

I laughed aloud. I really couldn't help it, it was so ridiculously sentimental, and so astonishing when one considered that it was Katie Powers. And Kate was affronted. She turned away, roused from her happy mood, saying something that I did not catch as I was giving a stroke at my oar.

"O Kate, no!" said Carrie softly, "don't say that!"

There came a slight splash up among the islands, and a curious rushing sound. We turned our eyes toward it, but could see nothing but black masses of shadow, blacker than the dark.

Sudden as the flutter of a bird, out from the narrow channel among these islands came the long sharp craft of the collegians, straight as an arrow, almost with an arrow's flight. For one brief instant its dark form hung like a shadow in our range of vision, a brief instant, long enough for a gasp of horror from the watchful. Then crash! came the cutwater, smashing into our side, crushing in a whole

plank, striking with an upward cast the seat right under Susie Waters, and sending her flying directly over Tom's head into the river.

The cry that shrilled through the night was heard a mile away. Then came the gurgling rush of water, and the boat was full.

"Into the river, boys!" cried Jack, dropping over the stern himself. "Jump in, and hold on to the gunwales — where's Susie?"

"Here!" spluttered Tom as he grasped at a thole-pin, with his other arm around her, and shaking the water from his eyes after his sudden header, while she, forgetting their chronic quarrel in that moment of terror, was clinging fast to his neck. "Here, safe and wet. Quite comfortable and happy, thank you; but what in thunder shall we do now?"

For once our chief was puzzled; the girls were safe, for the boat was so buoyant as easily to float them, now that we were out, although the water was waist-deep in the boat where they sat; but rowing was out of the question.

The canoe did not seem to be injured, but both its rowers had been thrown out by the shock, and now were clinging desperately to the oars, one of them pouring out a torrent of words very disagreeable to hear.

SUDDENLY CAME THE LONG SHARP CRAFT OF THE COLLEGIANS.

At last Bert Edwards turned on him, fairly roused, with the drawl gone from his voice, and in a tone that rang like steel :

"Hark you ! through your rascally clumsiness we have got into this scrape, and yet you can do nothing but swear ! If I hear another word of this out of your mouth I'll duck you till you can't see ! Let go of that oar ! "

"Don't drown me ! " cried the fellow in mortal terror, "I can't swim ! "

"What business have you in a boat, then, you idiot ? " And Bert, taking him by the collar, wrenched him from his hold. The man fairly howled, but his captor had not the slightest intention of ducking him. He dragged him to the side of the bateau, as a safer support than the oar, which was fastened to the canoe. He then went back for the other, who had not spoken a word thus far ; he seemed rather disgusted with the cowardice of his friend, and declining assistance, proposed climbing into the canoe and towing the other boat ashore. As nothing better was proposed, the twain were separated with some difficulty, the "Copenhagen" rope brought into requisition, and after twice pulling back the collegian from climbing into the bateau, threatening him with

condign punishment if he tried it again, the bateau was slowly towed to a bar.

After that first scream the girls did wonderfully well, sitting down on the bottom of the boat as they were told, although the water was deep therein, and alltogether showed remarkable self-control. Katie did not scream at all, and only long afterward confessed that she was frightened. She treated it then like a grand good joke, for "if there had been a panic, you know, what would have become of us? So I laughed — that was all I could do."

That was a great deal, though; not every one would have thought of it.

But Katie — well, she thinks of everything! She's the only girl I know who ought to be a "Miller," and — a boy!

CHAPTER VII.

IN SHADOW.

DAY before yesterday, Tom Wylie came rushing out of an office on State street, with a paper in his hand, and his face glowing with excitement. Waving it enthusiastically over his head, he pounced upon me with a cheer, and dragged me into his sanctum.

"Hurrah for Zethel! read that, my son, and ponder!"

"That" was a newspaper item detailing the capsize of a small yacht upon the Horicon, with a freight of two — persons — and five ladies. The two creatures that called themselves men had swum for it, leaving their companions in the lurch; but one brave girl, after assisting her companions to reach the keel, *swam ashore with them*, one by one!

The account was given without a word of comment;

but the very silence of the editor seemed bitter sarcasm, as though no words of his could equal the simple statement of fact.

"Plucky for a girl, or a man either! Still, what of it, Tom?"

"What of it! Why, Susie Waters for a hundred thousand!" cried Tom.

Sure enough, the next mail proved him right; not that she said much about it — merely mentioning it to compare the scrape to our own Fourth-of-July upset, of sorrowful memory. But we could read between the lines; and what a torrent of reminiscences the letter set loose, merry and otherwise!

It was one of the results of that upset that all the girls, save Carrie, who were in the boat that night learned straightway to swim; and more than one of them have since blessed their stars that they knew how. A Boston lady who was summering at a private house taught them; and although fresh water was a very different matter from the buoyant waves of Nantasket, yet she succeeded wonderfully, and two or three times a week a merry party trooped over to Kate's.

The river was broad and gleaming, fringed with towering elms, studded with islands that were fairly walled with green, the dense jungle of river-drift and

AT THE OLD BOAT HOUSE. 123

chokecherries matted and interwoven, and everywhere twined the intricate cordage of the wild grape and clematis.

Every bend had its long bar of hard sand, across which the limpid water rippled, soft and enticing to bare and pink little toes; and the old boat-house, almost in ruins from the riotous waves that tore through it in flood-times, served as a dressing-room, and its front platform as a stage from whence to dive, while it often swarmed with figures in the scarlet of the "gym."

The girls even set up a boat of their own, and, after upsetting once or twice in the middle of the river, and drifting down a mile or two before grounding upon a bar, they learned to manage it tolerably well, although, as they scorned advice, their oars entered and left the water like a flight of stairs, or an arithmetical progression; but their souls were serenely above such lowly matters of detail, while to be allowed in the boat by themselves at all, made them so giddy that they challenged us to a race, and won it too! It is true that a jacket marvellously resembling Bert's got under our bows in some singular way and was towed there, but they were blissfully ignorant of that fact; and there was something rather mysterious in Jack's way of using the paddle in the stern.

Another result of the collision was less joyous. Jack came to school one morning looking very sober. The laugh was gone out of his voice, and he did not whistle as he turned the corner; he was alone, too — Carrie was sick.

What was the cause? He did not know; it might have been the shock that night, or the long walk homeward in her dripping state, or neither; he had not seen her yet, but the black two-wheeled carriage was at the door, the doctor's gig. The bell struck sharply with an iron clang that brooked no delay, and we Millers filed silently in. The low hum of study began in the dim hall as seat after seat was filled; but up beyond the gray pillar, in the little corner of the massive chimney where the "immortals" sat, there were silent faces. Day after day there was the empty seat, the desk that no one opened. Katie brought us daily bulletins at first, and afterward we were allowed to see her for brief moments, and we had no fears then; but the hopeful "no worse" imperceptibly glided into the sigh "no better." There seemed to be a listless drifting away of sense and soul, a never-ending weariness. Rest was all she asked for.

"I am so tired — so tired!" she would say, and look up at us so pathetically.

Hand in hand with her the summer passed. The

UNDER THE HONEYSUCKLES.

trees began to droop, heavy with autumn fruit, and the roadsides were gay with golden-rod and asters. We made her constant visits. We brought fresh

autumn flowers, and smiled, and tried to forget the inevitable. But Jack! They had been playmates from childhood. Jack had been her hero; none could mend her playthings like him; none could carve toy tea-sets so deftly; no one knew so well where the most beautiful May-flowers nestled in the grass among the knolls. She had always been delicate, and he was so strong and well! She was helpless now; and no task was so difficult, no search so arduous, but the merest wish would drive him half frantic till he found the means to gratify it. Even Katie was not as helpful, dearly as she loved her, for the river was between, and she had her own duties at home, while Jack lived in the next house. It was a relief each day when the morning greeting was over, as he came into the school-yard, never late, but rarely before the last stroke of the bell.

We knew why he delayed. Morning after morning he wheeled her little lounge out upon the broad piazza under the honeysuckles, where she could look up through the curling leaves at the patches of blue sky and fleecy cloud, or watch the bees and sphinxes flitting among the yellow fire-throated trumpets while the faint perfume came floating softly down.

One day I remember very well: the school-house

windows were open, the south blinds closed. The breeze sifted through the shutters, lifted the loose paper upon the desks lazily, and let it fall again in

THE THUNDER STORM.

the same places, too listless to waft it away. There was a languid hum of recitations, a weak effort to study. There came a low muttering, a rumble, distance-faint, and the room grew suddenly dark. A

sharp gust of wind hurtled across the hall. Jack looked up dreamily, his thoughts far away in bygone history, and glanced carelessly out of the nearest window. The dark-blue mountain wall had vanished, and in its place was one gray sheet of rain, rushing down across the valley before the wind. Crash! went his book upon the floor; his hat was snatched mechanically from its peg, and in an instant Jack was tearing out of the door like a whirlwind; and when the startled instructor reached the porch he was fifty rods away, and running like a deer for home. They called him before the faculty afterward, and I was summoned as a witness; but after all they were only men, and they merely requested him to ask leave next time, lest his example should prove demoralizing.

But with the cool autumn days came a slow color back to Carrie's cheeks, and her transparent little hands grew less feverish, and sometimes a smile danced in her sly eyes. Katie said she was going to get well. The Millers' Club held a grand celebration over the news, and so did "Their Club" too. Jack was radiant; and, almost in spite of himself, he again found his way to the Mill and the ball-ground, or strung his bow and ranged the silent woods.

About this time, too, came the Trojan War.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MULLEIN SPEAR.

NOT the original war. That happened somewhere in the neighborhood of two thousand years ago, more or less — rather more. This was a second edition on a very diminutive scale, something like looking at history through the small end of a telescope.

Just how it began I hardly know, unless it was from a flighty remark of that doughty Miller, Tom Wylie, in the Virgil class, when he spoke in highly irreverent terms of my particular hero; and the matter did not drop when we left the room. Jack proposed arbitration; but we declined to arbitrate, and he finally gave it up, called us a pair of idiots, and looked disgusted. I wanted to laugh then, and so did Tom, I think; but as he straightened up again, of course I did. We did not speak to each other that

week. The quarrel spread among our special friends, until about half of the boys were at daggers drawn over the absurd question whether Æneas was a sneak and a weak scoundrel, or a persecuted hero and a demigod. I believe that one or two actually came to blows.

One day, while trying to get a shot at a marauding hawk, and climbing about a rocky hill in search of him, I sat down on a ledge to rest, and pulled a last year's mullein — there were forests of the dry stalks everywhere.

It was rather warm, and I had a "declamation of the brain," which had been promised for the next meeting of the Millers; and I began abstractedly to strip off the dry leaves and to hammer out the seeds upon the rock. The plant happened to have a long pointed root; and as I muttered away at the speech, I took out my knife and began to trim it down. It proved to be extremely tough, and a dim comparison with the fire-hardened spears of savages crept into my mind along with the poem I was repeating; and as I reached the lines —

> "Strike! till the last armed foe expires!
> Strike! for your altars and your fires!"

whiz-z-z flew the javelin-like shaft at the menacing

head of a rotten stump. Straight as an arrow whistled the missile, and stuck fast in the wood at a height of some six feet from the ground.

I looked at it with interest. If a light one would do that, what wouldn't a heavy one do? Hawk and declamation were forgotten together, and I hunted that whole hill all over, until at last a giant mullein turned up in an angle of the ledges, growing from a crevice.

I had an idea, and was bound to push it. Under the hill was a corn-field; picking up a pumpkin, as I crossed it, I stuck it on a stake, and with a bundle of mullein lances at hand, practised away at the yellow orb as long as it was light enongh to see, and that was until I could bury the head of a shaft in the target three times out of four at fifteen yards, and twice at twenty. I was satisfied, and felt my future prestige secured. I could not help knowing that I was the best archer in the whole school, for I was the most persistent in practice, beside having a certain talent that way. It is wonderfully pleasant to know that you have one gift that is your own, one in which you excel; and I could appreciate the feeling that led an English athlete to exclaim that it was the joy of his life to know that he could thrash nine out of every ten Frenchmen in Paris. And he was not a

quarrelsome man, either: it was merely the sense of power.

Something of the same spirit filled me the next morning as I hastily ate my breakfast, and started on a run for the academy long before school-time.

My big mullein caught Tom's eye at once, and his love of a joke made him forget his vendetta. He was all interest and curiosity.

"What will you take for a shot at your hat with this thing at fifteen yards?" I asked casually.

"Drive ahead!"

There was quite a crowd around us now, and I had to take a deal of chaff while Tom leisurely stuck the hat on a limb and paced off the distance, whistling.

I toed the mark promptly, poised the redoubtable lance lightly in my hand, drew back a step and hurled it humming through the air.

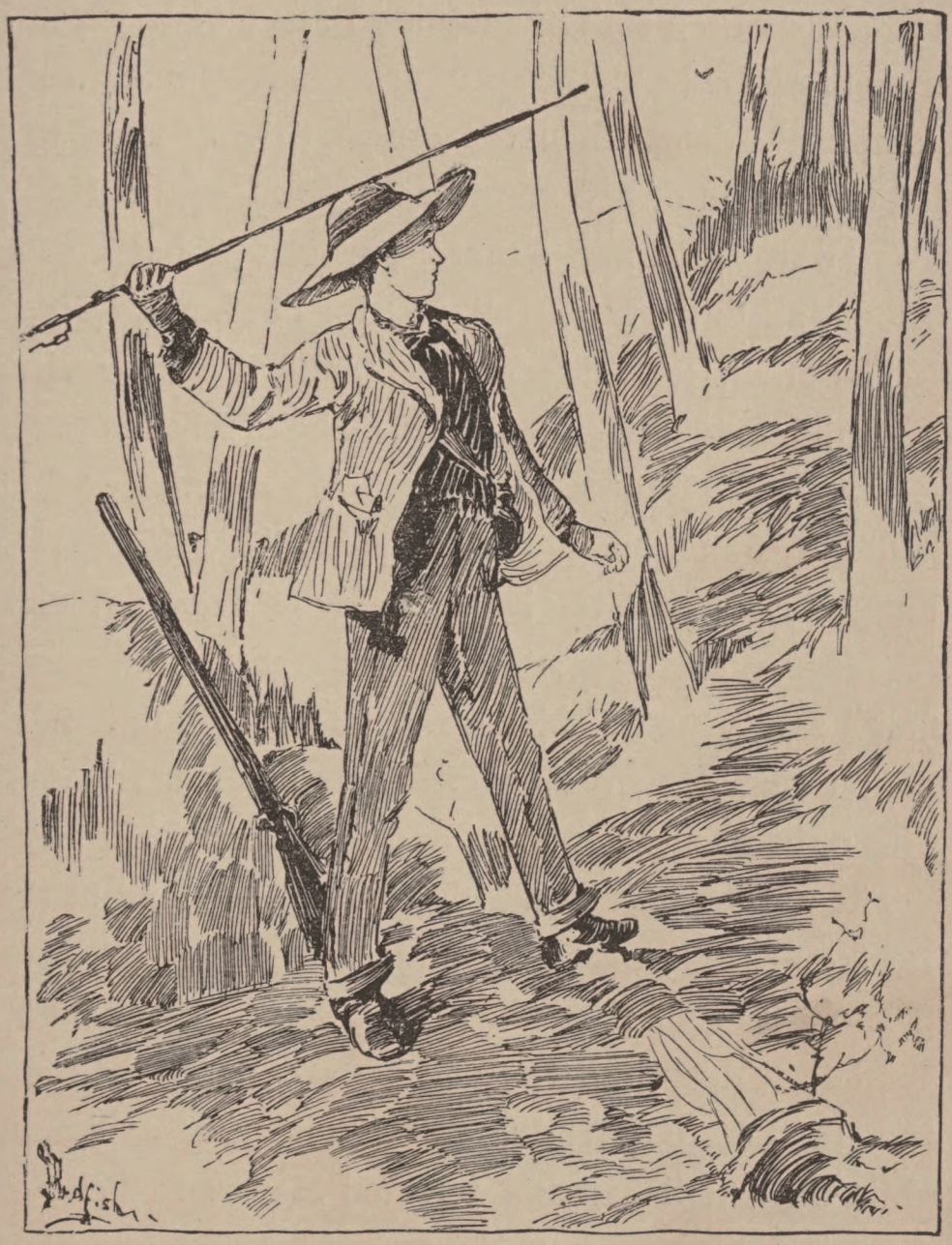
"*Thut!*"

Right through the centre on the tile was a hole large enough to put a fist in! There was a laugh among the boys, and signs of a cheer. Tom looked ruefully at his damaged helm for a moment.

"Give me another shot, Tom?"

"No, by the Trident!" he said, rallying. "I'll keep that hat there until I riddle it myself!"

That was Tom all over. But he found it easier said



FRED HAS AN IDEA.

than done, and at least fifty throws went wide or struck flatwise; he persevered, though, in grim earnest, again and again, till at last a lucky shot passed through the same hole as mine, and he dropped upon

the grass with a sigh of gratified relief; after which I once more toed the line and in two consecutive throws completely demolished the crown, driving what was left of it a rod or two so upon the point of the lance. Tom wore that hat — that is, what was left of the brim — all through the fall, just for the fun of it.

The others looked on rather blankly at our practice. They did not quite know what to make of it at first, and — practical creatures — asked what was the good of it. They found out. That very day Tom Wylie and Faffy Sintoes were to give a dialogue in Mr. Hall's room — an elocutionary study from the Iliad; and first a smile, then a snicker that culminated in a roar, went around when Tom came on the stage armed with a tin washboiler-cover and a mullein spear!

The parts were taken with great energy, and at the most exciting moment Achilles hurled his spear at Hector with such force that, flying past him, the sharp point sank deep into the soft pine door at the rear, and stood there quivering amid thundering applause, while the astonished and terrified Hector ran out of the room like a scatted cat, looking anything but heroic.

"You see," said Tom, explaining afterwards with a grave face, "I thought he would look more natural if I didn't tell him that part, for he might have

dodged too quick; but I never thought he would really turn and run!" and Tom looked rather abashed

AT A TARGET.

at the failure of his novel hit in rhetoric. It was an absurd affair, and the master had all he could do to

keep his countenance as he came forward to examine the missile. He did it, after a fashion, and published an edict then and there, as he marked the depth of the hole in the door, that all spears hereafter should be blunted. By way of a salve he suggested that in our Saturday holidays we might go through some of the scenes of the Trojan War.

Now that was a genuine inspiration! It gave us something to think of, insured us a tremendous lot of exercise, was likely to keep us out of other mischief for one while, and, besides, it set us all a-tingle to dive into our Greek and Latin.

Such preparations! The Mill looked like an armorer's forge, the man of pots and kettles was driven distracted by the sudden rush of orders for helmets, shields, and strips to manufacture into armor, and thought seriously of ordering a carload of tin to meet the demand. Our helmets were quite elaborate affairs, lined with flannel and cotton-padded, with fencing masks in front, re-inforced with an extra gridiron, arrow-proof, as our bows were very light. Our shields were made of almost anything handy, from tin to leather, and highly decorated, while we all had short cut-and-thrust swords of hard pine at our belts; and whole sheaves of arrows were made from the shafts of the æsthetic cat-tail, of

HECTOR RUNS LIKE A SCATTED CAT.

clothyard length, by simply cutting it off at that measure, and thrusting a small nail, or winding a strip of soft lead around the larger end, filing a notch in the other for the string.

It was very unfortunate that there was a split in the Club. Together we should have been the "Invincibles;" but Tom was Greek to the marrow, and Bert Edwards followed suit, led on by his ambition. Towering head and shoulders above the rest of us, nothing would do but he must be Ajax. As he said himself, he was of no use in council, but in the field or at supper he would turn his back to none!

Tom grinned with delight, and promised him the appointment in the apportionment of parts, glad to get him at any cost. I vowed to myself, though, that he should pay for that defection! Just wait until we are really afield, Master Ajax, and see! He did.

In one thing we were brothers still: we used the Mill as a common armory, and under the direction of Jack's genius we all five had contrived complete sets of scale armor, manufactured by our united efforts; and as they were the only ones in the two armies, we were the "Invulnerables," at any rate. We had the the honors, too, Tom and Bert being elected Ulysses and Ajax, Jack being Æneas, of course, and of course

I was Achates; while, as no one would be Hector, Charlie became Pandarus, which was a pretty fair showing.

The girls were left out in the cold this time. All the leaders voted against them.

"It will only make trouble and jealousies," said Ulysses with his accustomed sagacity; "we should hate to lose any if on our side, and Ja — a — Æneas, I would say, would fight like blazes before *he* surrendered them, and some one would get hurt in any case. Better have the ground in the Big Pines, and put them all up on the ledge where they can see the fight to their hearts' content, and be all the saints and divinities in the calendar if they choose, and hospital nurses for both armies!"

This was agreed to finally, and Kate had to be satisfied, although she scolded me well for not pressing her claim, and vowed that if I fell under her hands she would show me no mercy.

A code of laws and regulations was drawn up and ratified, in which it was provided that a hit in the body was fatal, unless the recipient wore scale armor, and entitled the giver to his opponent's sword and shield — if he could get them — while the owner was obliged to remain where he fell unless carried off, being put upon honor to do so. Of course there were some

who tried to evade that; but after the first skirmish or two the dishonorable were tried by court-martial and drummed out of the ranks!

It was also arranged that a hit in a limb disabled it; if the owner could go off on the others he might; and if not hit again, after receiving a bandage of red flannel at the hospital, he might join the fray again. A blow upon the head did not count unless the helmet had been smashed off or it knocked the warrior down.

Finally, it was voted by all that to lose one's shield under any but very extenuating circumstances was a disgrace, and disallowed one to be carried in the future until won from the enemy, when the warrior was to be publicly re-instated to his position.

We found these to be very wise regulations — we owed them to Ulysses' fertile brain — as they saved the battle from becoming simply a common row, dignified the whole proceeding, and gave a chance for real skill and courage. No one wanted to be disgraced — before the girls especially — and every spearman in the assembled host took the most excellent care of his skin in consequence.

CHAPTER IX.

IN TIME OF WAR.

A GOOD many skirmishes occurred from time to time, as we tested our arms, making changes here, adding a scale or a belt there, drilling ear-holes to hear through in the helmets (that important point being overlooked in the original design), and bringing them to perfection generally. We had to get accustomed to them, too, so that it was some weeks before all was ready.

There came a Saturday, at last, when all was still in the leafless woods. Not one mullein could be found upon the Zethel hills, nor a straight cat-tail in the swamps: they had gone to fill our bristling sheaves.

There was a glitter as of burnished steel among the trees. Long files of warriors threaded the paths toward the Pines, and gathered in a dense throng

upon the green little plain among the ravines. The girls were enthroned aloft upon the ledges of the overhanging mountain, the Law was solemnly read and sworn to, and the two armies took their stand at their respective stations, Jack — that is to say, Æneas — and Ulysses drawing lots for choice. We were the fortunate ones, and took the "defence."

It was a delightful place to stand a siege in. A turbulent stream tore down by our right, swollen by recent rains, and, after a sweep partly across our front, curved suddenly and went roaring under the cliff where the girls were posted. There were two gullies across the front beside, with a narrow ridge between where they did not quite meet, nearly in the centre of our line, and growing deeper at either end, while our left wing was posted in a huge mass of broken rock, covered with woodbine that served both for concealment and as a ladder to climb around by, while the ravine on that side ended at its base. Altogether a strong position; and every man of us had a bundle of light spears, and one or two heavier ones for close quarters. My own was the same big mullein that started the whole affair, and the heaviest in the two armies. It was a great stroke of luck, my finding it.

It was rather quiet at first, as we posted the different leaders and their divisions. There had been a

tendency to howl when we came in sight of the campus, but now that we were actually waiting battle with a strong doubt as to who was likely to be the winner, Greek or Trojan, it had a sobering effect; I could see more than one eye flash through the mask of the helmet as I passed on Æneas' bidding, and the grasp upon the spear tighten nervously. I was chief of staff, and staff too, besides having a division of my own massed as a reserve behind the centre, ready to be sent to the aid of a hard-pressed leader; so I saw a good deal of what was going on.

Suddenly there was a stir among the lookouts at the centre. An arrow had leaped out of the covert, away across the glade, and clanged against a shield among them, and the glitter of helms was noted here and there. Jack broke from a conference abruptly, and ran up among them. The centre was our weakest point, and here he had stationed my reserve division; possibly the time had come thus immediately.

His appearance was the signal for a shower of arrows that completely cleared the rock of scouts, and rattled against his shield. They had a peculiarly vicious hiss — those arrows — they did not seem to be coming fast until they reached us, and then there was no dodging. Each man grasped a spear in read-

iness, brought his shield in front, then lay low, awaiting the onset.

There came a shrill yell from the enemy's centre. At the signal, from the whole length of their line a stream of arrows came pouring in upon our centre, until we had to rally by fours for self-protection, for the shafts, converging, raked us from either side.

Æneas had got behind a tree, and was coolly watching the trees across the green. "Steady, boys, this won't last long," he said knowingly. "They mean to charge under cover of it. Keep perfectly cool — perfectly, remember!"

It was hard, though, to lie there with those arrows driving past, and not reply. I stepped forward to Æneas' tree, handling my shield rather nervously. I was hardly used to it as yet, and wondered whether my armor was really proof.

"*Tsang!*"

I found out. A shaft struck me fairly in the side, and splintered on a scale; but it hit hard enough to hurt. I got behind a rock rather hastily. I could hear Æneas chuckle, and I felt disgusted.

And now, like a whirlwind, a whole division of skirmishers broke from the cover, charging across the open ground with their shields held over their heads, led by Meriones (Fred Winchester, with a horse-tail

plume), and Ulysses himself. Not at the centre, not at the point so recently harassed, but straight at the unprepared left wing.

But in a twinkling every man was on his feet, and a volley of spears sent more than one Greek limping back; but, never heeding, the rest dashed on with a yell, and charged headlong up the rock.

For a moment it seemed as though they would carry it, and a rush was made for the spot, promptly checked by the commander-in-chief, who, suspecting a trap, sent me hastily over to the right wing to investigate. He knew the wily foe he had to deal with.

So fiercely did the valiant Greeks storm the fortress that in a twinkling they had run up the vines like monkeys, and were fighting hand-to-hand across the top, while the clash and clang, the din of battle, rang loud and clear above the roar of the stream, and made many a heart leap and tingle. It was all that Jack could do to keep them from rushing to the spot in a crowd. But he had drilled them well, and not a man dared stir without orders.

In the mean time it was getting warm about that rock; nearly a third of ours were disabled, and went limping along the line toward the hospital as fast as they could travel, and already among our men could

be seen the strips of red on arm or thigh of those returning. As I ran up from my scout I caught a glimpse of a Greek in complete armor hand-to-hand with an unfortunate son of Troy, saw him cast away his spear and grasp his enemy around the body and roll down, over and over, to the foot of the rock, and then fairly shoulder his prisoner and walk away with him. "See that, Achates? That was Tom Wylie," said Jack, grimly laughing. "What news?"

"I found the archers coming up the river ravine in force, and in our rear already; but the bank is steep, and I sent Sarpedon back with his division — he can hold it awhile."

"Good! Take twenty spearmen and clear that rock."

In an instant we were in motion, sweeping down with yells upon their flank. They did not wait. A shrill whistle came from the woods, and, slinging their shields upon their backs, away the Greeks scurried across the glade, hotly pursued up to the very edge of the woods. Gathering up hastily the scattered spears and arrows, we ran back puffing, and were at once ordered to the imperilled right, where the noise, the clash of arms, and the shouting, betokened the hottest work.

And now Jack had got a little impatient. We were having all the fun. He wanted a share. "Here,

you Pandarus, take care of the left, and keep your eyes peeled! Glaucus, guard the centre! Achates, follow me!" And, with a ringing cheer that reverberated through the glens, he dashed away for the seat of war, closely followed by my whole division.

Just in the very nick of time! The enemy already had foothold and outnumbered us; they swarmed up the steep bank among the trees like ants, and arrows fell like hail among us, and here and there came the dull clang of a sword-stroke. I felt for my own sword with savage fingers — no more long-range work for me. I had borrowed a bow for a time, and thinned out their sharpshooters considerably; but this was earnest, and I kept close to my leader's back.

"Hurrah! down with them!" shouted Æneas, breaking through the rank to the foremost van. "Hurrah for Troy, Hail Columbia and Happy Land! Give 'em fits!" and he hurled his spear at a chief that was pressing us hard, striking him full in the breast; then out leaped his sword into the light of day and quivered above his head. Clang!

Down through the stormers fell the Achaian, sweeping a swath among them. A torrent of spears tore through their ranks, a score of sword-points bristled along the ridge. The patter of their javelins had ceased among us, as they were too near to throw.

Diomede was their leader, and wrought his name with an arm that never tired.

But who could paint the glories of that fight! Who could enumerate the mighty deeds there done by those who held, and those who stormed, the bank! Above, eight Trojans lost their shields in that wild fray. Twice as many long-haired Greeks lay still beneath, yet the fight goes on. It spreads along the whole line, we hear the war-cries right and left; arrows from the centre pass over our heads hissing, and, as they fly, we hear the appalling war-whoop of that mighty Miller, Ajax, charging upon our front, secure in his armor, and dealing destruction.

They gave it up, finally, and ran pell-mell down the ravine along a narrow ledge by the water's edge, while once more we rushed back to the front, Æneas stopping on the way to pick up a few prisoners for future exchange, which were immediately paroled.

"Look out for Achates!" sang out Ajax, as I hurled a javelin at a reckless fellow standing unguarded at short range. He fell, and all the Trojans shouted. Forgetting the danger, I ran forward to secure his arm, and was instantly surrounded by Ajax and his men. I was quick, and light of foot, but nothing saved me but my being left-handed. They could not parry my blows at all, while I dodged

and twisted, smashed in helmets and doubled up shields, until they fairly shrank away and left me for Ajax to settle. *Then* my hands were full.

Bert wanted fame, and sailed in like a paladin, leading me a lively dance. My helmet was crushed, and a downright blow brought me to my knee in spite of a ready guard. I was so dizzy I nearly fell, which would have finished me, while the Greeks rushed forward in high glee. I heard a scream from among the girls upon the bluff, and the thought of failing there — I did not stop to reflect further, I would *not* fail!

Up went the sword again. Straight in under it I leaped with a lightning thrust at his stomach, and, as he instinctively attempted to parry, a blow right on the hilt of his weapon dashed it rods away — and now for vengeance!

But the Greeks were upon me again, and, as the champion shrank away rather crestfallen among them, I turned suddenly, and darted back across the neck amid a round of cheers. The first one I met there was Jack.

"Well, Achates, you've done it, haven't you? One, two, three, four," counting the results of my foray; "six of them settled!" and his tone betokened a great increase of respect. "But, I say, don't try it

again, for it was tremendously rash; were you mad, that you tried to handle Ajax? Why, I shouldn't care to, myself, while I am commander and responsible for the rest of you!" And I daresay he looked indignant at my temerity, but as his helmet was closed it was lost on me.

So was everything else for a moment or two. My head rang like an empty kettle with the stunning whacks of those villanous Greeks, and as I took off the battered tin pot that covered it, while we stood for a breath in a sheltered corner, I nearly fell.

"What is it, Fred? Are you hurt? Where? Here, you two, take that hurdle and run up to the hospital with him, quick as lightning!" Jack cried, more frightened at my pale face than at anything else that day.

I did not answer; I think I must have fainted, more from sheer weariness than from any injury received, for I remembered nothing more until I suddenly opened my eyes and found them staring straight up into Katie's. For five or ten minutes I lay still, looking up in a dazed way as they bathed my face, trying to think how I came there, until Katie blushed. Then I concluded that it was all a dream, and rolled over to go to sleep again, when she gave me a provoked little shake that brought me to my senses.

Leaping up, I put my hand to my head; it was bare, and dripping with water. A shout came from below, and I saw the Greeks charging across the neck.

It came to me then. I snatched up a Grecian helmet that lay near, Katie buckled it on, and I rushed for the ford, and met my followers, who had now to depend chiefly on sword and shield, being minus both spears and arrows; but so were the Greeks.

But that rest was a grand thing for me! I felt like a new man. We three brother Millers gathered our divisions in the rear of the centre for a moment's breath, then we ourselves strode forward and held the neck alone, shoulder to shoulder, in true knightly style, against all comers — only they didn't come.

Their spears did, occasionally, but I gathered those myself and distributed them among my men, keeping one or two for future use. Even Ulysses declined to meet us, and suddenly disappeared from sight, while the rest gradually withdrew, until Bert was left half way between the opposing armies, vainly urging them to return. They seemed to care very little for another advance like the last, and as we noted their diminished numbers we sent up a yell.

Suddenly a Trojan spear from somewhere on the left came humming past; I saw it one instant, the next it struck the Grecian on the crest, loosening

the already weakened bands and knocking the battered head-piece completely off. A shout of dismay burst from the opposite woods as the scattered Greeks saw their champion standing confused at the unexpected blow.

Now for it! I leaped to one side. With all my strength I hurled my heaviest spear upward — upward — curving gracefully. How anxiously I watched it — thud! It struck the great Greek squarely in the ear!

Such a cheer! the woods fairly trembled as I dashed forward, wild with delight, for my spoils. Every Greek in the line who had a spear or an arrow left launched it straight at my devoted head, and so fierce was the storm of missiles that I threw myself flat — but mind you, under me was the great shield of Ajax.

"Hurrah for Achates! charge 'em, boys!" At the word on rushed the Trojans like a whirlwind in a solid column. Springing to my feet, I found myself in the ruck of spears and clashing swords, swept along by the torrent and hurled right into the midst of the scattering Greeks. *Thud! thud! tsang! clang! clatter!* Cut right, guard left, parry front, hurrah! Down the glade, into the woods, through the gorge, we drove them, thrusting mercilessly at the

rearmost, and with a wild cry swept them on and on through the ravine and plump into an ambuscade!

That villain, Tom!

From every tuft of spruces along the slopes out leaped a warrior. They swarmed around us like a cloud of hornets, front and rear; the air was full of sardonic laughter, and — the bitterness of it! — triumphant cheers. The day was lost!

I saw Æneas cleave the helmet of a stalwart Greek; I saw Pandarus hand to hand with two warriors, each larger than himself; then a dozen swarmed around me and I could see no more. Each strove to be the first to seize me, for I had wrought far too well that day to be forgiven. Better for them had they been slower, or at least accustomed to a left-handed swordsman, for I was mad with rage! We had been so near to victory!

It was not play now. Shield over head, and sword in hand, I plunged into the fray, and what happened then was afterward all a confused chaos of blows received and given, of strange cries, of a sword rising and falling with monotonous regularity, of a frightful numbness in my shield arm, and at last a sudden rush backward that left me alone in the centre of a circle.

ACHATES ARRIVES ON A HURDLE

I glanced around, panting hard. Not one Trojan left! The Greeks were victorious everywhere, save in that slender ring around me, leaning on their shields and breathing heavily, or exultantly shaking hands.

I lowered my right arm, and at the motion my own shield fell from it and rolled away among the feet of the foemen, leaving the band still around the arm. I watched it with an odd regret, half-dazed, half-comprehending.

"Now then, boys!" came a shout in my rear, and there was a rush for me at Diomede's cry. I wheeled instantly, and ere the words were fairly out leaped straight at him like a wildcat; he at least should go down first, and he did, with a smothered yell; and then, with swift bound and parry, I broke through the ring and stood without it — free!

"Don't let him escape!" was the cry; and a dozen Greeks or more shot out in pursuit. Never was running so hard. My heart beat fearfully and my temples throbbed. I, who could outrun any boy in town, was being rapidly overhauled. With set teeth I buckled down to my work, and, nerved by the need, shot ahead of them, heedless of the javelins that came driving past. Reaching the battle-field, I caught up the precious shield of the discomfited

Ajax, who sat by the bank of the stream bathing his ear, with a look of profound melancholy, shaking his fist as I splashed past across. A bow and quiver lay near, and I secured them just as the pursuers arrived at the other side of the stream and paused irresolute.

I heard a cheer upon the cliff, and knew that the girls were there, but I felt too sore to care now. Dropping my sword, I sent half a dozen shafts whistling across as rapidly as I could notch and draw, and was far too near to miss.

They charged pluckily into the water, but the cobble-stones were slippery, and first one and then another went down, while my bow was not idle, and — well, only one reached the top, and he was minus sword and shield, lost in the rushing water.

"You are a pretty picture!" I could not help remarking as I hauled him up by the collar wet as a drowned rat, sputtering and gurgling, nearly strangled by the water he had swallowed; a remark which he made no attempt to deny. Giving him a moment's rest I marched him down the stream, my one solitary prisoner, until we came opposite the Achaian host busily dividing the spoils, with a disconsolate group of unarmed Trojans looking on. The battle was over, and, as some other vanquished leader has re-

THE VICTORIOUS FLIGHT OF ACHATES.

marked before me, all was lost but honor; but I felt that I had honestly earned a fair share of that.

As they rushed forward in a laughing crowd I held

up the shield of Ajax and cried in classic language:

"Where is Ajax? Where is Diomede? Where is Teucer? Where Meriones? Great hath been your victory, Grecians! another such would be your ruin!" And with a defiant war-cry I slung the shield over my shoulder, dismissed my captive, and left, standing not upon the order of my going, for they were preparing to give me a volley for my impudence.

So the battle was over. I have told it as I saw it, and the parts in which I was. There were other deeds of derring-do that far surpassed my own, but I did not see them, and the chroniclers were contradictory. If I have told too much of my own doings it is because of my position, and because I was so mixed up with the rapid flow of events. I will offer the testimony of an enemy, however, lest I be charged with egotism.

Years afterward I saw hanging in a gentleman's library a battered old shield, punctured everywhere, seamed and jammed with many a scar and dent; but on which was still visible a blue anchor, dimly painted, and under it the mystic legend:

"AXATRS." ΑΧΑΤΗΣ

I stared at it with wide eyes, recognizing it in-

stantly, and involuntarily back went my head, and my left hand sought an imaginary sword-hilt.

He laughed outright, enjoying my surprise:

"I was there. You were a stranger to me then, but my brother was a student and took me along. I was one of those whom you drove out of the rock-heap, and nearly broke my neck getting out of your way; and was 'in at the death' when you ran into the ambuscade—helped surround you, in fact. That thing rolled under my feet when the strap broke, and I thought it a glorious prize then!" he added with a laugh. "I treasured it as the highest I have ever won, and for old times' sake have kept it ever since. See!" pointing at a dingy card hanging from it. Even at that late day a thrill crept over me and straightened my muscles suddenly, as, half-ashamed of my emotion, I read:

"This was the shield of Achates, the best spearsman in the Trojan host, who, after overcoming Ajax and slaying fourteen other Greeks in the following *mêlée*, was entrapped in an ambuscade by Ulysses the Crafty.

"From this, he alone, of all the Trojans, escaped by bursting through the ranks, overcoming Diomede and Teucer in the massacre, and the twelve who pursued him beyond the river, bearing away the far-famed shield of Ajax. His own shield was beaten from his hand in the ambuscade, and captured by a Grecian, who preserved it with great honor."

CHAPTER X.

"THEY SAY" (*as related by Tom*).

THAT is Fred's version of the story. Well, I believe he was something of a warrior, after all. And the rather absurd consequence was that the whole school rose to do honor to the vanquished; and presently we Greeks grew as sore over it as though our side had lost the day, especially the great Ajax. He had the felicity of seeing his gorgeous shield slung over the club fireplace in the post of honor, surrounded by various other trophies that Fred had gathered on the battle-field. And then, too, his head ached. Fred *is* a pretty good hand at the spear.

The girls all pounced on that young gentleman the moment that he entered the school-yard next Monday. They made him a wreath of ivy, compelled him to kneel while Katie put it on, stuck a hawk's feather in his hat, hailed him "heroic Achates, conqueror of

great Ajax!" and made a fool of him generally. He deserved it all, I suppose. Certainly no one else

"HEROIC ACHATES, CONQUEROR OF THE GREAT AJAX!"

could have got out of our ranks scot-free; but he is quicker than chain lightning, and left-handed at that,

and Bert should have considered himself lucky at his escape from surrender, in spite of our rush to his succor.

The party feeling ran so high, the girls developing such fierce partisanship, that Principal Gibson was wise in putting an end to our existence as Trojan and Greek. He declared that we had acted like a set of young Fijis, instead of comporting ourselves with historical dignity.

But though we ceased to exist as separate peoples, days and weeks passed before there came an end to the last of the envies, jealousies and bickerings. I know I, for one, hated our old club-room. For, like the late war that left no privates, this one left no dead. Every warrior had at least one story to relate of his adventures, and a defence to make of his own prowess.

But perhaps the most exasperating thing to us conquering Greeks was that not a solitary girl was on our side. They could not seem to assimilate that ambuscade stroke of ours. In their opinion, it was awfully mean of us, and we should be ashamed of ourselves for winning in such an underhand way — downright cheating! They didn't appreciate strategy worth a cent. They stuck to it that Fred was a first-class hero and Jack a martyr, while the Greeks were a set of long-haired rascals, anyway.

In vain we Greeks invited them to look at our gallantry. We had to do the storming while the Trojans had every advantage of position. We had charged them valiantly, met them man to man; but, dear me! it didn't do a bit of good. We had beaten Jack, regularly outgeneralled him. Fred had fought a dozen of us single-handed, and we were soulless renegades in consequence. 'Tis dangerous work meddling with people's favorites!

It was long before we settled down again into the steady hum-drum of school-life. Sly allusions to some well-known incident would crop out, even in recitation, to set the school in a roar, while the weekly Lyceum paper found the Trojan war a mine of wealth.

Principal Gibson ought to have suppressed that paper. All through the fight it had a corps of wide-awake reporters on the cliff, pouncing unerringly on every accident that might be made to take a ridiculous turn, and forged it into a shaft against which no armor was proof.

And then, too, it was so out-and-out partisan. It was unblushingly Trojan to the marrow, and we unfortunate victors had to do all the squirming, while the men of Troy were applauded to the skies. Finally they threw their whole batteries into position,

and enfiladed us with all the keen sarcasm and cutting wit peculiar to a company of bright girls when properly provoked.

"See here, Susie," I ventured to remark one noon, after an unusually bitter personal attack upon myself in the Lyceum paper the evening before, "is this fair? What have I done to be pitched into and fired out of the window in this fashion? There was nothing underhand about it. Everything was above-board and according to the usages of war; and if they were stupid enough to run into the ambush, they should stand the ridicule and not we."

Susie hesitated a moment. "I don't think it is the ambush itself, Tom," she said, slowly, keeping her eyes out of the window; "I am afraid you yourself are responsible in a great measure for that article."

"I!" I cried, astonished.

Susie's face became scarlet. She bent over and fingered her locket, brushed away vigorously an imaginary speck from her dress, parted her lips to speak and closed them again.

"I am waiting," I suggested gently, after a long silence, during which I had conned in vain my past record for any sin deserving such expiation.

She looked up, suddenly, passionately: "I *will* tell

you, Tom, for *I* don't believe a word of it; but the girls in our Club all declare that you kept out of the

SUSIE SPRANG UP IN CONFUSION.

fight, and planned an ambush because you were afraid to meet either Jack, Fred or Charlie, and that

the only way you dared was to take them at a sly advantage. You haven't been with the Club at all since the beginning of this Greek business, and they say that you have broken with them and are trying outside to undermine Jack's influence in the school so as to be head of it in his stead; that you are going all the time with Hi Randall and his set, and every other hateful thing that they can think of!" Her voice faltered as she went on with charge after charge of "they says," till, breaking off in the middle of a sentence, she dropped her head upon her arm and fairly cried.

Slam went my books upon the floor; I was mad, clear through.

"*Who* said that?"

"A-all th-the g-girls say-so."

"Does Jack say anything of the sort? Has it been discussed with *him?*" and a dreary feeling came over me with the questions.

"I don't know," she said, with her face still hidden. "It isn't like him, but neither is it like Katie. Yet Katie is as hard as the rest."

I rapidly thought it over. If this was to be the end of it all, if the Millers had judged me thus, I might as well give up. I had seen all I wanted to of Randall and his set, and more too. I could

only settle to the bottom like an agitated coffee-ground.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she queried, raising a tear-stained face.

"I? What — oh, yes — I don't know!" was my lucid response.

"I know what I should do!" she exclaimed, with emphasis.

"What?"

"Go to Jack and demand a trial by the Club!" she answered. "They have no right to condemn you unheard, and it may be a mistake after all. If folks would only speak right out, and not go on suspecting and thinking and hinting! When Kate and I quarrel I always go straight to her afterwards and ask what the matter is, and if I am wrong I am not ashamed to ask her pardon. I don't believe in pride that keeps one from doing that, and I never can read of any such misunderstanding without longing to box their ears all around. Come, don't be a turkey now and stand on your dignity. I declare, if you do I'll never speak to you again as long as I live, and I'll — I'll go myself!"

I really think she would have gone.

I gave a sigh of relief. It's first-rate to have some one to decide for you sometimes. "I — believe — I — will, Susie" —

"What treason are you two plotting now?"

There was Jack in the doorway. We had been so busy talking that we had not heard him, and there he stood in laughing astonishment at our excited attitudes.

Susie sprang up in confusion, and ran out, dodging under his arm with a scarlet face, but casting at me over her shoulder a look so significant that it decided me to bring the whole miserable business to an end then and there.

"See here a moment, Jack!" I said as he started to follow her. Something in my tone checked him. He looked back curiously for a moment, with his hand still on the latch, then closed the door and returned.

"All right, Brother Miller, fire away!"

"Do you know what all the school are saying about us?" I began, with forced calmness, and then, growing angry again, I ran rapidly over the line of Susie's charges.

For a moment Jack flushed high. But I went on, and Jack sat down and heard me through, my cheeks growing redder and redder under his quizzical eyes. When I finished he just threw back his head and to my great indignation burst into a long and hearty laugh.

"HI! FRED, BERT, CHARLIE, COME OVER HERE!"

"My dear knight-of-the-rueful-countenance! what nonsense you are talking! Great Scott, don't you know us any better than that? Here," dragging me along out into the yard rather mulishly, "Hi! Fred, Bert, Charlie, come over here! There's witchcraft brewing against our most worthy chief jester!" and then as the Millers came sauntering up, he told them all about it.

They laughed a little, and then Trojan or Greek began to turn decidedly wrathy.

"Confound those girls!" said Bert; "can't they let well enough alone? Let's hold a council and give 'em a lesson!"

"Just let it die out," observed Charlie sagely; "All Tom's got to do is to frequent the Club a little more. Only I say, Fred, you can take Katie in hand a little, and curb her wrathful soul. This is half on your account, — she didn't fancy your having to cut and run so lively, and she knows a fellow or two made fun of you. She cares a heap more about that than you do, and it only needed the suggestion that Tom's honor had exodusted along with your heels to stir her up right valiantly. She had you in the hospital to wail over too!" grinning at the thought until Fred was as rosy as a peony. Some things will make Fred Parker blush very easily; but we have to stand

from under when we do that thing, for he hits back.

"Let's run over to Lisle Pond, and have a fish supper to-morrow night, like good old Club times," suggested Bert carlessly.

"Not a bad thing for Their Club to hear of," said Jack; "any objections?"

Nobody objected; and to-morrow night came. But that was the last time that Jack ever called me 'chief jester."

CHAPTER XI.

AT LISLE POND.

CHARLIE was wringing out the water from the bottoms of his trousers-legs in the warm radiance of the big driftwood fire. Our old boat leaked like a sieve and had to be hauled out of the water as soon as we landed, to keep it from sinking. We had bailed all the way over. Fred, as usual, was frying fish. Our Chief sat down comfortably with his back against the huge log that formed the rear wall of the hasty fireplace, and wrestled desperately with a battered old brass cornet with varying success; now swelling visibly with triumph during a lofty flight of warbles, and then looking as disgusted as is compatible with a puckered mouth during a succession of efforts that ended with a squeak — which we all always applauded.

He did not mind at first. "Hear that echo!" said

he after a plaintive bleat. "Isn't it remarkable? Hear now"—and he blew again.

Whereupon the woods on the opposite shores sent back the maniacal laughter of a loon that came sailing up from the south at precisely the wrong time, and began to make night hideous with his long screams.

"Very beautiful!" remarked Fred across the fire gravely. "Quite like an angel choiring with the cornet, Jack." And then he dodged just quick enough to escape a boot that rose from the sands and took unto itself wings.

Jack turned good-naturedly to watch Bert's absorbed marksmanship. That stalwart youth lay at full length upon the golden sand, drying off in the slanting rays of the half-hidden sun, and was on the point of taking aim for about the sixth time at a giant bullfrog lazily rising and falling with the rocking waves on a pink-ribbed lily-pad. Bert, lazy dog, always had his catapult at hand, and his shot-pouch full. The lead r-r-ripped vindictively through the leaf within an inch of the solemn-eyed batrachian, but the veteran never moved a peg. "Hang it! I couldn't hit a barn!" drawled the disconcerted marksman amid a general laugh. Bert was notorious for his poor shots. "You needn't laugh!" he said, a little vexed. "I'll stump any fellow here to hit him!"

ON THE WAY TO THE POND

Our catapults appeared as if by magic. A deliberate aim — tsang! The shot cut out all around the target and tore the leaf to pieces without one hitting him. The old fellow coolly swam with a slow snort of surprise for another leaf, and leisurely climbed out on it as far as it would float him.

"Oh, let him alone, boys," said Jack: "we are having a good time, and why shouldn't he?"

The sun had set, and the long shadows stretched away in streaks of inky blackness, with the flash of foam here and there as the short choppy waves began to leap and toss impatiently under the lash of the rising wind. An owl up in the birches gave a long-drawn, melancholy cry that far across the water was echoed from the mountain, along with the answering scream of a belated hawk as he swung slowly down his invisible spiral way and drifted rapidly away nestward, among the trees. There was a shiver in the air; it cooled suddenly when the sun went down, and it was almost dark.

Hark! miles away a sound came trembling through the night along the hills. Faintly, a sighing rather than a sound, falling softly as the autumn leaves in the gathering twilight, came the slow, mournful toll of the deep-toned bell that hung in the village church.

"Tol-l-l-l — !"

There was a silence among us. We looked at one another. A minute passed, then came again the note, swelling in the wind to startling distinctness.

"Tol-l-l-l — !"

"Who can it be ?" whispered Fred, drawing closer to Jack's side.

"Hush !" said Jack softly, with his head averted, laying his hand gently on his arm.

We drew closer to each other; instinctively we were each counting the strokes; there was silence, broken only by the soft wash of the waves upon the sands, the rush of the pine boughs in the forest, and that solemn tol-l-l — ! tol-l-l — ! tol-l-l — ! tol-l-l — ! swept past.

Strange thoughts came to us waiting there. Who was it for ? Ah, did we not all know, yet shrink from uttering the name ?

At last the sobbing died away. The wind came rushing over the lake, sighed and moaned about us in the pines, but the sorrowing bell had ceased its notes, leaving us still dreaming that we heard their muffled footfalls, still listening for more. There were no more.

A single cry, sharp, bitter, broke on our ears. It was Jack. "Sixteen ! Boys, it is Carrie !"

"Oh no, Jack! she was getting well so fast!"

"It *is* Carrie! Carrie!" Jack, our Chief, turned over and lay face downward on the sand.

Sometimes I hear Jack's low sob now, at night; hear that throbbing cry and shiver. It was torn out from his very soul right through the iron grasp of self-control and Saxon pride. Girls can weep, and wail, and wring their hands until they are faint with the physical effort, and the bitterness dies out from sheer exhaustion of body and spirit, and none will look askance. But a boy among boys must hold his sorrow at bay in his own heart and brain, asking no sympathy, receiving none, fighting back his grief until the heart throbs dead, dully, and the brain is all but mad — without a cry; and all to keep his self-respect up to an iron standard which he himself has made; to preserve unsullied his idea of manliness among his mates — and after all perhaps to be called thoughtless, unfeeling, by people who have grown up beyond their memories!

Face downward on the sand, not another sound came from him, only now and again that sudden, sharp quiver, like the flash of a wounded nerve that struck him with a shock, and left him motionless when the spasm passed.

Fred got up and went over to him; knelt—lay down beside, and put his arm around him without a

SYMPATHY.

word; and the older lad understood, was grateful for the unexpected sympathy. But neither spoke,

nor did any one, for a long, long time, while the wind whistled among the trees, and swept the ashes of the fire away to leeward into the forest. The foam glittered here and there out in the darkness, as angry waves came leaping in higher and higher before the rising storm.

At last Jack arose, dizzily at first, as though he did not quite know where he was nor how he came to be there, nor where he was going, but walking mechanically toward the boat. Fred went too, but Jack seemed unconscious of him. Even when he had put his shoulder under the quarter and shoved the bateau afloat we did not seem to notice that Fred had followed him aboard and now sat in his accustomed place in the stern; but grasping at the oars he dashed them into the water, and strove to row away from his grief with mighty strokes that made the timbers creak and quiver, straight out from shore into the teeth of the darkness and the storm. We watched them — Jack bending low to his oars with a white, desperate look, Fred sitting upright in the stern, and with an easy turn of his wrist and paddle keeping the craft head to the sea. The next moment they run off and out of sight.

Bert sprang up and heaped more wood upon the fire until it flared high in the gale.

"Fred can steer by that," he said.

"Tom," said Charlie to me presently, "Tom, that boat can't live five minutes in this sea. It leaks like a sieve, and they'll not stop to bail; Jack won't, and Fred can't, so they'll swing broadside to and roll over!"

"If the Chief was alone," said Bert, "he'd let it go down — and go with it! But when it comes to the point, Jack will hardly let Fred drown for him. He's not himself, but he's not so far gone as that, and I am rather glad he has the storm to fight with heartily before he lands again. There's a limit to even his strength and endurance, and when he fights to the uttermost and gives up, the bitterness will be half gone. See, what's that?"

Something black was tossing in the water, blacker than itself; it soon came in on a spiteful wave. We ran to the point. It was not the boat; it was the bailing-bucket a quarter full. Some ten or fifteen minutes later a hat and paddle came in. Fred's.

We scattered along the shore and kept watch. Suddenly Bert gave a great shout and rushed into the water. The boys had drifted ashore. Both. They were floating on the oars. Jack had his fingers locked upon Fred's collar, looking white and weary. Fred had gone down once.

Without a word we took them by the arms and stumbled along the path around the northern shore

until we struck the road, and the way was plain. Then I spoke to Fred in a low voice: "Is the Chief himself?" And he answered in the same tone, "Yes."

The boat had gone to the bottom, and neither Fred nor the Chief were at Carrie's funeral, nor at school for many a long day after. And when they did return to us the snow had come and gone, and the early flowers — the arbutus and the violet — were blossoming in May.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SUGAR THIEVES (*as recorded by Tom*).

THAT was nearly the end of Club life among us Zethel young folks. All winter long the mill stood silent and empty, with shutters barred and padlocked doors. No red lantern of stormy nights swung its signal to the home circles. We had little heart for amusement without Fred and the Chief; and taking turns at watching with them was not particularly cheering. The girls' club-room was equally silent. There was an empty chair now, which would never be filled again by the sweetest, gentlest of all the merry Petticoat Nine. Besides, without Katie Powers at the lead, there could be no junketing and outings, and Katie had no heart for anything of the sort.

But the winter came on and dragged away; and quietly, almost without our consciousness, the grief grew less. The boys were slowly on the upward

road; we no longer looked sober when returning from their bedsides, and sometimes Katie could smile. It had been long since she did that. I laughed one day; it startled me, and I looked reproachfully at the jester. But it was easier next time. To some of us the sorrowful look still came at times, and a silence would fall in the midst of the merriment as we saw Katie or Susie stealing away with downcast eyes and tears trembling among their lashes. No one questioned why, nor was it openly commented on; only a sigh in answering sympathy, and soon forgotten. Young hearts rise rapidly from the bitterest grief, and, like a bowed sapling, the heavier the burden sometimes the sharper the recoil; and when at last March came — March, with its long coasts, its miles on miles of glittering, crispy crust over hill and hollow, fence and wall — the most of us laid our sorrow in its grave away, plunging anew into life's gayety.

It was but just daylight one morning, and all the mountain tops were flushed with tender rose above their whiteness, and from the trees hung drooping boughs; every twig bejewelled. It was dark still in the bottom of the valley, underneath the overhang of the mountain, and the crust gave a sharp crisp gride under an iron-shod heel. It was chilly, but I heard a bluejay's rattling scream from the corner of the barn

where a trace of corn was hung for our feathered friends.

The middle coast was crowded; I could see scarlet hoods flashing down the slope in the distance, and worked my way cautiously thither, now dodging a double-runner as it glanced down the hill with the rush of a whirlwind, striking its bell of warning, and again making way for some long, low sled, with a fair-haired, radiant-faced girl in front, and a snapping-eyed youth in fur cap and mittens looking over her shoulder with a fixed, intense gaze after breakers as he steered with ready heel past ambushed stump and lurching hollow.

A sharpshooter came whizzing by, and as the boy caught sight of me, he swerved to the right so suddenly, that he went headfirst into a gully half filled with the loose snow blown in from a recent slight fall.

"Halloo! Charlie, is that your usual way of turning out?" I shouted, as he came hastily up the bank as white as though rolled in flour.

He grinned a little, and shook himself lustily.

"How's Fred?"

"Sitting up."

"And Jack?"

"Better last night."

"First-rate, isn't it?" and his face shone with satisfaction. "Come up and have a go," he added hos-

A TURN-OUT.

pitably. "Bert's up here with Fannie Nason, as sleepy as an owl; he was out by moonlight last even-

ing, and now here he is at it again before breakfast, and she's making no end of fun out of him."

"He won't complain!" I laughed, "so it's none of our biz; but is not that Katie Powers?"

Charlie nodded a little grimly. "Yes, they've got her out at last; she's grown as white as Jack himself with staying indoors.

"What do those girls see in that good-for-nothing Jim Long to admire?" he broke out suddenly, in a volcanic sort of way, as we trudged upwards. "He's a born coward, treacherous as an Indian, and no more idea of honor than a toad! All he is is veneer —suave, sham! and a pretty face and the best sled in town. He walked up to Kate and Susie as indifferently!—and they are sliding with him now!"

Long himself came up before I could reply; a decidedly good-looking fellow, although too broad-shouldered and short-legged for symmetry.

"Halloo, Tom! what say to going over to the other coast, and paying a friendly visit to Deacon Hayward's sugar orchard? Not the whole crowd, you know, just Kate and Susie, Bert, Fannie Nason and you two; sap ran well yesterday," he added suggestively. "At any rate, we are going," he added, as we did not assent.

I made up my mind instantly. "All right!" I

cried, swinging Charlie into the sled before he could object. "One slide first!" and away we flashed, with a "Clear the lul-la," through the crowd of reckless coasters.

"Tom, what in time did you say that we would go for?" Charlie exclaimed angrily, the moment we stopped.

"You heard him say the rest were going," I remarked calmly.

"Yes, and he'll get them all into some rascally scrape yet!" he growled, looking up the hill with a frown.

"Exactly; just why I consented."

"Oh, I see!" a light breaking on him. "You've been taking lessons of the Chief—it's just what he'd have done. Trudge ahead—I'll follow!"

"Tom, Mr. Long says you would not dare venture into the Deacon's sugar orchard if he hadn't proposed it and led off," laughed Susie a little maliciously as we came up, with an amused glance at her escort, who colored up as he met my rather sullen look.

I had, as he knew, private reasons of my own for holding Master Jim to be anything but valiant; but I passed it off as a jest, and we all went on in a friendly way.

Deacon Hayward was an elderly Quaker who had

lately purchased a hill farm in the township, and of whom the boys were greatly in awe; for no good reason, though, that I could see. Just below the orchard of towering maples was a very long, very steep hill full of sharp pitches, and the broad meadow below was overflowed and frozen over. The coast was a dangerous one, and also tedious to climb, hence generally deserted by the coasters. They didn't object so much to the danger, but they did dislike to toil, puffing, up those roof-like pitches; it was too much like work to be funny. We skirted the summit of the hill, and as I climbed the brush fence cautiously, I remarked, "Don't go too far from the sleds, girls; we may have to effect a change of base very suddenly."

"Tom's afraid, as you can hear for yourselves," said Jim Long tauntingly; and then in a spirit of bravado he set up a shout that made the woods ring with echoes of "Dea-con! Dea-con! Thieves, Deacon!"

I did just ache to thrash that fellow! but I had promised Jack — well, never mind what; only I hadn't touched him since the promise.

The first buckets had little or no sap in them, and what there was was frozen; so we pushed some distance into the grove, the girls in their scarlet hoods flitting like red-headed woodpeckers from tree to tree

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in their search for kindred sweets. Jim was ahead, recklessly tossing every empty bucket far into the untrodden snow, and wrenching out sap spiles; but he forgot to keep the lookout required of an advance post, and happening to glance ahead as he kicked high into a bucket at which he had had a long pull, he was thunderstruck at a terrible apparition. There, not three rods off, were the Deacon and Pelatiah Macomber, his hired man.

For a moment the braggart was paralyzed. He evidently had had dealings with Pelatiah before. The "hired man" had his shovel with him, an implement for which he always had the tenderest affection, and which was always kept polished to mirror-like radiance. Jim glanced at Pelatiah, then at the shovel — he evidently had had dealings with that shovel also. And now the girls were here to see.

With a yell of terror he darted through the woods like a pigeon, cleared the brush fence at a bound, jammed on his hat, and vanished toward the sleds. We had followed more moderately — there was time enough — laughing at the ridiculous spectacle of his fright, when Charlie sprang forward with an exclamation, "The coward has run for it!"

On the instant the rush of the sled proved his words.

I hastily helped Susie over the fence, for the enemy were coming on the run after us luckless culprits. "Down on it, quick, and be off!" pointing at Charlie's sled.

She sat down promptly, without a word, and tucked up her feet and dress.

"Pile on, Charlie!" giving him a shove before he had time to think; and instantly they were spinning away over the brow of the hill! I drew a long breath; they were safe from the Deacon's grasp, at all events.

Kate and Fannie came running up out of breath, looking doubtfully at Bert's sled, now the only one left. It would hold but two for such a coast.

"Yes; on with you, girls, quick! You can steer, Kate, can't you?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Tuck up that dress more — hurry — now then!" and with a quick, straight, strong shove, away went they, shooting down the slope and disappearing beneath the ridge of the first heavy pitch, Katie throwing one serio-comic glance over her shoulder, half-regretful, half-laughing, and then of necessity absorbed in her steering.

The next breath Bert and I were in the hands of the Philistines! and right angry Philistines they were too.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATE OF THE CAPTIVES (*as recorded by Tom*).

WALL, I vum! thet's a leetle the smartest thing I've seen yit!" puffed Pelatiah, returning from a fruitless chase after the fugitives, and taking Bert by the collar. The Deacon was gravely holding us each by an arm, in an iron grasp.

Pelatiah was tall, and was thin, and was gawky. His apple-shaped head crowned a neck like a heron's, while his rubicund nose glowed like a headlight in a murky night. His face was wrinkled, his teeth were stubby, and his mouth nearly made a peninsula of his head. He usually was on a broad grin, for he had no little sense of humor; just at present he was wrathy.

"What sh'll we du with these varmints, Deakin?" Pelatiah asked, giving Bert a savage shake, that brought a glimmer of steel into his eye.

The Deacon was busily stripping a birch sprout with one hand, and holding on to my ear with the other, two operations that required his concentrated faculties to bring to a successful accomplishment; hence he failed to catch the question, and the birch was steadily reaching perfection under my apprehensive eyes. I seemed to feel it already, and could even speculate on the chances of leaving my ear in pawn for the sake of escape. A scientific twist of the Deacon's solid fingers, however, nipped that idea in the bud.

As the master was solving the question in his own way, the hired man proceeded to bring his captive over the knee of repentance after a certain fashion of old, but found it necessary, presently, in consequence of various struggles, to lay aside his precious shovel; in doing this he unconsciously relaxed his hold upon Bert. That stalwart youth was burning red with shame. I caught a glimpse of his downward bent face, and, as the long-bodied hired man leaned forward with the slow and deliberate swing of a squarely hung well-sweep, I distinctly heard a short low laugh, and saw the victim as he gave a sudden twist and push, leaped forward with a celerity that even Fred Parker might have envied, snatched up the precious, polished shovel, and ere Pelatiah had picked him-

BERT IMPROVISES A COASTER.

self up, Bert was rods away down the hill, running like a deer.

"Here! here! drop thet shov'l, you young imp of sin! Le' go! Creation! — Drop it, I sa-ay! *Great Ginger!!* —

"Git off thet shov'l!!!!!" yelled the hired man, utterly aghast at the sudden turn of events, for, coming to the steepest pitch, Bert had dropped the bowl of the tool on the slippery crust, and while under full headway first jumped on, then cleverly stooped and sat fairly down in it! and away he went skating down the hill at a terrific rate, the handle of the shovel sticking straight out in front like a bowsprit, ever and anon disappearing in a cloud of snow-dust. Unheeding Pelatiah's frantic whoops, reckless of the dangers of the wild coast, his sole thought was to escape from the wrathful, long-legged Nemesis who came tearing down after him at a breakneck rate, to the imminent risk of his head. Swifter and swifter as each sharp decline increased his momentum, the keen air hurtled past his head. The snow-dust rose in clouds from his grinding heel, and drifted like a wraith along his wake. The shovel bowl grew warm beneath the friction — grew hot — and compelled him to stuff his coat tails beneath him, and even forced stern tears from his eyes as he shot on and on and on — past hollow after hollow, bounding up like a ball, coming down like a pile driver — till the laments of the far-distant Pelatiah grew faint, fainter, fainter yet and more broken, and his own speed began to slacken.

Then he rose to his feet with a leap, cast one startled look over his shoulder backward, and made a bee line for the pond, as a hunted deer seeks the water. Dropping down upon the bank, he drew his club-skates from his pocket and fitted them on in a twinkling, and when the much-abused owner of the desecrated shovel reached the brink, he was already far away up the meadow in pursuit of the fleeing sleds, skimming along with quick, light strokes in the rosy flush of the morning.

I sat down plump upon the snow at the Deacon's feet and roared! So did the Deacon; that is, he roared, being too dignified to follow so unconventional an example further. In so doing he considerately let go of my ear.

The sight of that animated hop-pole plunging down that hill of hills in hot and hopeless pursuit after a vanishing quantity, was more than all Quakerdom could stand, and tears of merriment rolled hopping down his round and hearty face till his modest shirt-collar grew limp and wet from sympathy.

He quite forgot me. Also the birchen rod. I pardoned the neglect. I prayed most fervently that he might stay in that happy mood for just ten — nay, for

five little minutes, as I rose quietly and tiptoed softly toward a clump of scrubby spruces. I reached them, and by a skilful flank movement gained the shelter of the woods. How long the Deacon stood there I do not know. At this date, I suspect until he thought I might be out of sight; but from the moment that I had a tree between us I had abundant faith in my wood craft, and had not read Fenimore Cooper for nothing!

Making a wide detour, I crossed the valley and came up with the rest of the sugar thieves just in time to witness Bert giving Jim Long a sound thrashing with a bit of board, "Pelatiah-fashion," to his great grief and the infinite dismay of the girls. Not, as he remarked, for getting us into the scrape in the first place, but because having brought Kate and Susie into danger he had run like a coward and left them in the lurch to save his own precious skin! Bert evidently had promised the chief no promises.

The girls begged him off finally, their tender hearts stirred to pity by his mournful howls, and Bert dismissed him with the favorite injunction of the Millers — to go, and sin no more.

He tried to keep it quiet, but the story spread, and it was weeks before our pretty-featured Jim dared to

look any one in the face; and the dandyism was completely shaken out of him.

I met the Deacon the very next day, crossing the

PELATIAH IS NOT TO BE CONSOLED.

Common, and offered payment for the sap that we had drank and the trouble he must have had to reset the spiles and buckets.

"Do not trouble thy head about that!" he said with a hearty laugh, "the amusement thy companion afforded me more than paid for what thee drank; and if what I hear be true, thy leader hath expiated his low mischief; also, if thee will come up to our home to-morrow night and bring the girls that thee got away so cleverly, we will have an honest, old-fashioned "waxing," such as my mother used to have fifty years ago! and I will intercede for thy lively friend Bertram with Pelatiah." And once more the old man smiled broadly at his recollections.

We went; but even the offer of a brand-new shovel was not sufficient to console Pelatiah, although with an air of long-suffering he forbore the vowed revenge; and to this day any mention of "Bertram" brings forth a melancholy shake of the head, as to say that no good can ever come of a boy that would slide down hill on a shovel not his own, to escape a little whipping!

On the twentieth of June the Clubs met for the last time. Graduation day was on the morrow, and many of us were to leave Zethel immediately after.

Kate and Susie were looking eagerly forward to Wellesley in the fall. Bert was bound for Bowdoin; Zethel always has had one representative there from the earliest times, as student or professor. Jack meant

A LAST VIEW OF THE OLD MILL.

to go also, but being ordered to a better climate, was to go to California with Charlie. Our dear Chief — we all knew he left his heart behind him in that little spot under the birches where the summer sunset strikes the green knoll. The flowers that grow there are found in but one other place in Zethel; in Jack's old garden.

Fred could not go to college either, owing to that wild swim, and the time and health it cost him; and a kind old uncle of mine found a place for him here in the city of books and spectacles; and we often meet and talk over the old Club days; and he tells me of the wise men that he meets and talks to daily, for he is "scribe" still. As for me, my uncle claimed me, and here I am, a broker "to be"!

But I am casting too far ahead of my fish!

That night the old mill counting-room was cleared of its accumulated rubbish, pictures were hung here and there among the trophies of chase and war, the furniture dusted, the astonished floor was swept, and andirons polished, and everything put in apple-pie order for the entertainment of the Petticoat Nine. The girls had never been there before, and it is little to say that they were delighted at the homelike cheeriness, the deftness of Fred as cook, and the facilities for washing dishes in the flume.

Yet it was a very sober time on the whole; we were all looking forward with steady eyes into the future, not frightened by the outlook, nor yet rejoicing, but with a calm determination to make the most of what talents and advantages we had, without striving after what we could not have. We all of us had learned not to cry for the moon.

So on the eve of parting we gathered around the fireplace as the cool evening fell, and, as the darkness lowered, and the mists crept up from the river and the firelight grew brighter and lit up the room with dancing visions, we talked long over our prospects, and painted our ideals in life and character without reserve; and then in the moonlit door, clasping hands in life-long amity and fealty, the two Clubs disbanded forever.

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